The Mermaid and the Lobester Diver: Gender and Ethnic Identities among the Río Plátano Miskito Peoples

by Laura Hobson Herlihy

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BY L. HERLIHY

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines gender and ethnic identities in the Miskito community of Kuri and in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (RPBR), a pluri-ethnic protected area on the Miskito Coast of Honduras. The study is based on long-term field research consisting of participant observation, interviews, and the collection of ethnic terms of reference, songs, and incantations. The research focuses on how Miskito identities are constructed, maintained, and negotiated as viewed through the eyes of the Kuri women. The central research problem combines instrumentalist and constructivist approaches with ethnicity and gender theory in an effort to explore how Miskito individuals use situational identities to gain access to scarce resources in their homeland. The results show how the control of resources affects the types of identities that Miskito individuals construct within the complex of power and gender.

Three major research objectives are accomplished. Data reveal that 1) Miskito individuals use "situational identities" (they manipulate cultural markers) during interactions with indigenous and ethnic Others, including the neighboring Tawahka Sumu, Pech, Garífuna (Black Carib), Ladinos, Creoles, and Isleños populations; 2) Miskito ethnic identity is constructed in matrilocal groups which leads to "female autonomy" tempered by "male authority" and 3) members of Miskito society participate in distinct discourses of gender ideologies--the male-dominant discourse revolving around the lobster economy and the subversive discourse surrounding supernatural potions, spoken in the household and other female-centered domains.

Miskito women's various ethnic and gender identities shift back and forth depending on the context at hand to ensure their households' economic survival while also passing down Miskito language and culture to their children. Thus, the situational use of identities among Honduran Miskito women is a significant and strategic social adaptation to living in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, one that ensures their survival and strong identity.

In memory of my father, Neal D. Hobson

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Lastly, and most importantly, I thank the people of Moskitia and especially my friends and family in Kuri. I spent a total of twenty-six months doing fieldwork in Kuri and travelling in the broader Moskitia region. Peter and I first completed a six month (January-June 1991) research project in the Plátano Biosphere Reserve, living primarily in the coastal village of Kuri. I returned to Kuri for six weeks in 1995 and then, again, for a year and a half during my doctoral research (February 1997- August 1998). I returned to Kuri in the summer of 2001, bringing my then two-year old daughter for the first time. In reality, I have spent most of my time interacting with one matrilocal residential group in one village. My experiences and observations, then, result from close interactions with a small group of women. This

manuscript is mainly for these women--the mothers, daughters, and sisters--whose voices I present through the pages of this manuscript.

The matrilocal group I lived with revolved around the powerful grandmother figure and respected elder, "Kuka" Denecela (Kuka is the Miskito kinship term for grandmother or respected female elder), and her daughters Delfina, Tomassa, Enemecia, and Ilabia. Kuka Denecela's family adopted me through fictive kinship, which the Miskito called "tasbaya taihka," established by those living in the same locale. In every way, the women of Kuka's matrigroup were true "sisters" to me. Our relationships were filled with real life emotions, including the ambiguous feelings of jealousy and devotion. Although we hailed from such different cultural backgrounds and socio-economic positions of power, we found commonalities between us in our kinship roles and familial identities.

One afternoon in Liwa Raya, Kuka Denecela's agricultural and hunting camp, I was lying in a hammock dozing in and out of sleep. The Kuka sat next to me sewing. I remember feeling the traces of her fingers brush across my forehead as she whispered, "pain luhpia" (good child). I had recently returned to Moskitia and made a special trip up-river to bring her about twenty US dollars worth of supplies from a coastal store. I had even remembered to buy Royal cigarettes, her husband Octavio's favorite brand. Being considered Kuka's wealthy, white daughter or being treated like an economic resource bothered me little. In fact, I wish that I could have provided her with supplies more often. What was more important to me was

experiencing Kuka's motherly nature and learning from her about Miskito kinship practices and social identities, while I played the role of dutiful, but inquisitive daughter and at times, rebellious sister.

Chapter One: Introduction

The Miskito peoples live in a rainforested and coastal-lagoonal region along the Honduran and Nicaraguan Caribbean Shore (Figure 1.1). As indigenous peoples, the Miskito speak their own language, Miskitu, which is a Misumalpan, Macro-Chibchan language of South American origins. The Miskito peoples trace their ancestry to an Amerindian group that intermarried with African and European populations during the colonial era. While other Latin American native peoples have disappeared or experienced culture and language loss as a result of the colonial encounter (Gould 1998; Maybury-Lewis 2002; Stonich 2001), the Miskito have grown in numbers, expanded their territory, and developed a strong ethnic identity (Dodds 2001; Hale 1994; Herlihy 1997a, 1997b, 2001; Offen 1999). Today, about 175,000 people culturally identify themselves as Miskito. Two-thirds of this population reside in Nicaragua, where they gained international attention during the 1980's as rebel soldiers in the Contra-Sandinista wars.

The first modern ethnography on the Miskito was written by Mary Helms (1971). Helms believes that the Miskito have managed to survive and thrive as a population group thanks to their successful interactions with the outside world. Indeed, the Miskito continually expanded their population and refortified their identity through their constant interactions with British, North Americans, and other foreigners. In the colonial era, they were residents of a British Protectorate; in the last one-hundred and fifty years, they were evangelized by the Moravian missionaries

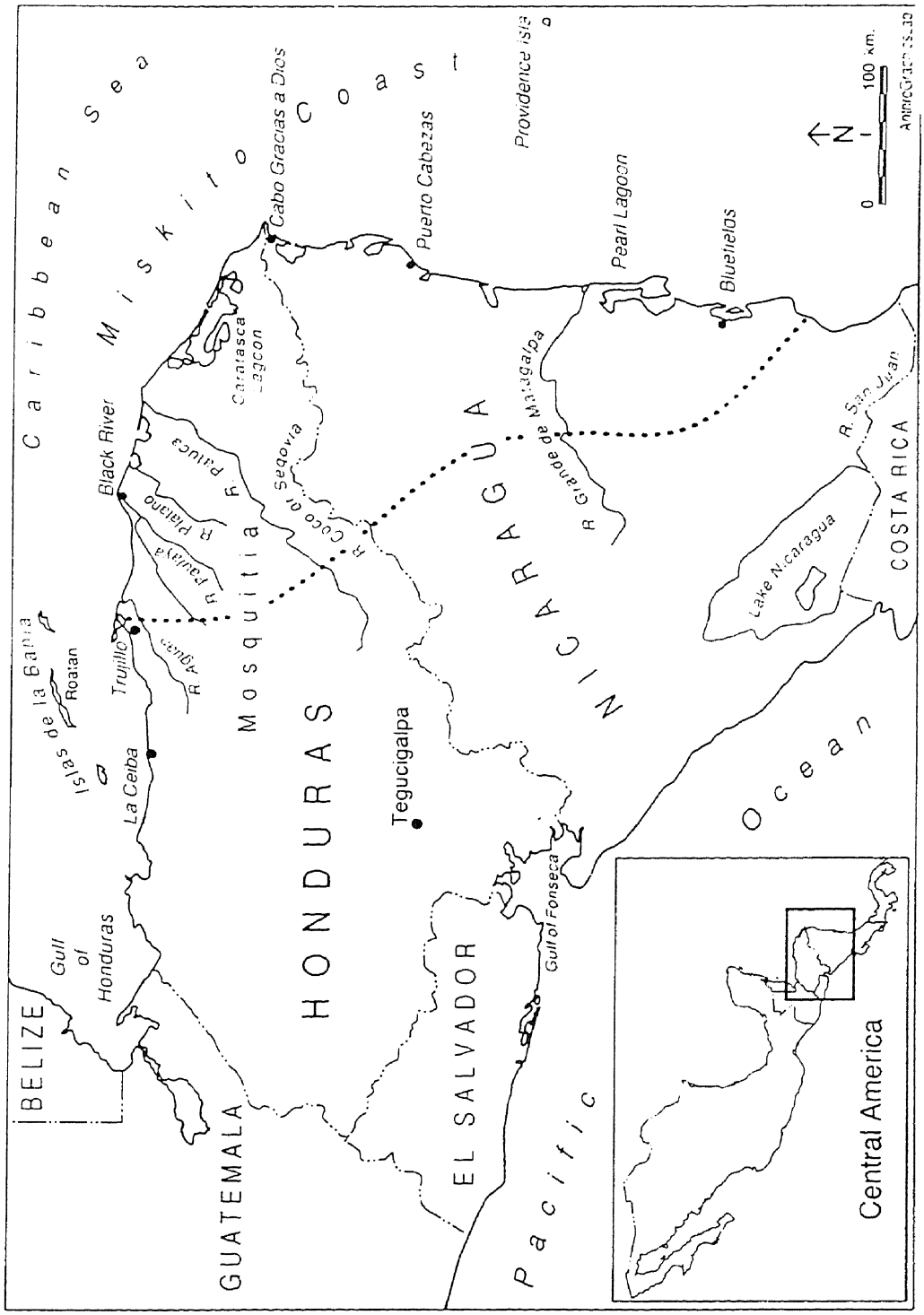

Figure 1.1 Locator Map of Moskitia (Dodds 2001:86).

and employed by North American and other foreign business enterprises (Conzemius 1932; Nietschmann 1973). As a result of international exploitation of local resources, Miskito men were hired as laborers in various extractive enterprises and hence adapted to a cash-oriented economy. Helms (1971:7) characterizes the Miskito as a "purchase" society, where foreign goods have become cultural necessities. She contends that because of adaptations to outside influences, the Miskito peoples have maintained and fortified their customary practices and cultural identity.

My research illustrates the extent to which Miskito identity is fluid, allowing members to adapt to various environmental, economic, and social settings, all the while remaining "essentially" Miskito. The Miskito reside in both coastal and riverine villages, participate in both subsistence and cash economies, and intermarry with all ethnic groups in Moskitia. My research explores how the Miskito people have fabricated such a malleable, yet strong collective identity. My dissertation privileges the local and regional levels of social life where collective identities are first mobilized.

My research examines how Miskito identity is constructed, maintained, and negotiated in the social organization of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (RPBR), an environmentally protected area (Figure 1.2). While much of the scholarly literature defines ethnic identity as a product of the nation-state (Brysk 2000; Dean and Levi 2002; Maybury-Lewis 2002; Urban and Sherzer 1991; Wade 1997),

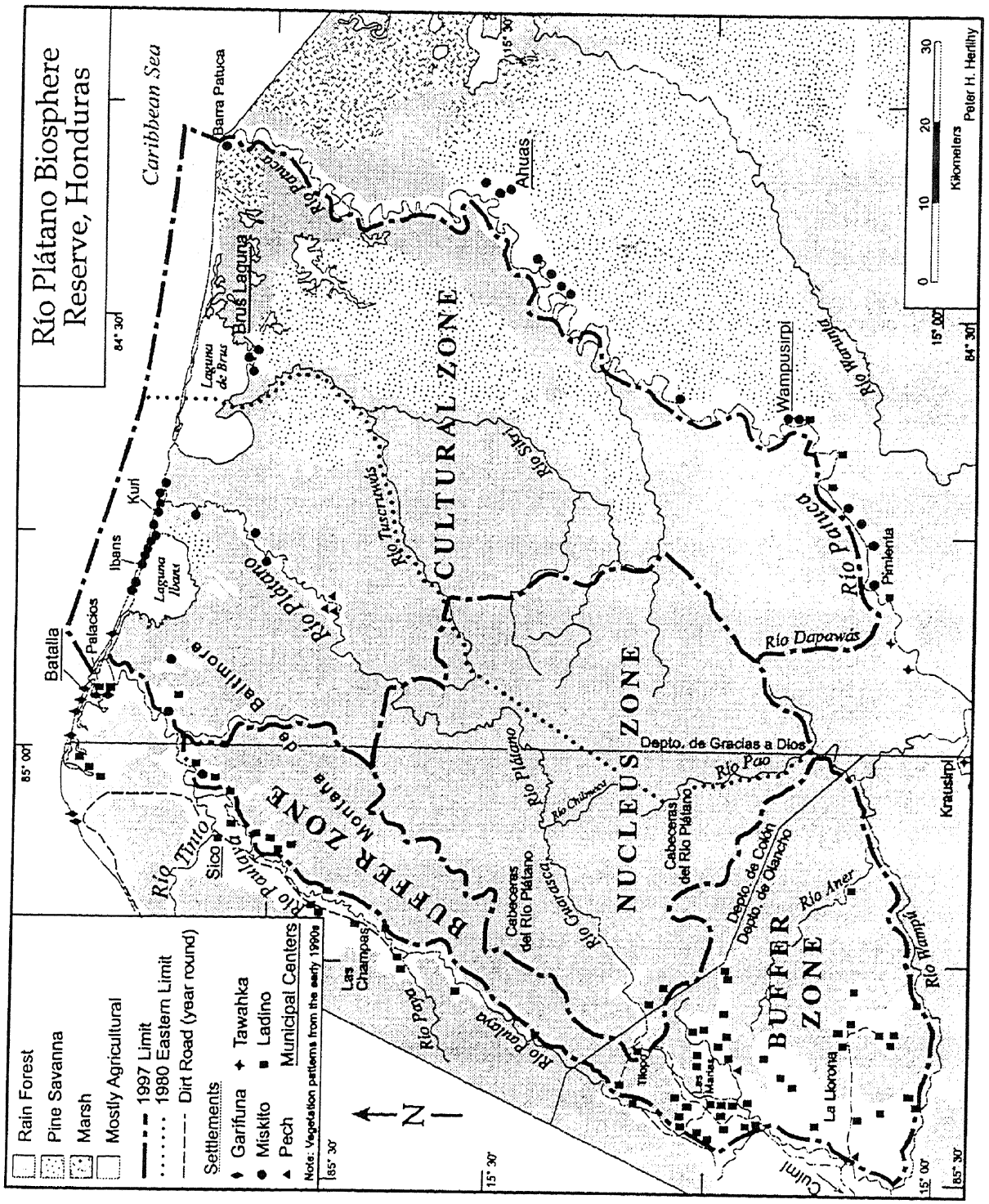

Figure 1.2 Map of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (Herlihy 2001:100).

my research analyses the process in which Miskito identities, especially ethnic and gender identities, are constructed at local and regional levels. I conducted field research in the small Miskito community of Kuri (pop. 165) and in the broader Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (RPBR).

Field research focused on Miskito village organization and inter-ethnic relations in the reserve. I examined the social and economic organization of Kuri households, gender-power relations within the community, and ethnic relations in mixed-Miskito villages in the broader reserve region. These patterns of social organization and gender relations facilitate our understanding of what "being Miskito" means in the RPBR. While conducting field work, my primary research objectives were: 1) to show how Miskito individuals construct situational ethnic identities when interacting with Others; 2) to show how Miskito identity is transmitted in matrilocal groups; and 3) to show how Miskito women construct situational gender identities in different social settings. I argue that being raised by women in matrilocal groups and learning how to use situational ethnic and gender identities creates the fluid and enduring character of Miskito identity in the RPBR. These characteristics of Miskito identity at the local and regional levels should be understood as the base from which their larger national and international identities are constructed and negotiated.

My doctoral work is a reaction to the many studies that define Miskito identity at the national level only (Adams 1981; Bourgois 1981,1985; Dennis 1981;

Dennis and Olien 1982; Diskin 1989, 1991; Falla 1982; Hale 1994; Nietschmann 1984, 1989; Olien 1983; Vilas 1989). Completed in the 1980s and early 1990s, these studies tend to overlook many important aspects of Miskito identity at the local and regional levels. Such a perspective is now common place in anthropology. Frederick Barth, for instance, enjoins us to analyze the full spectrum of identities that individuals use in particular social contexts. Barth claims the concept of nationhood is an "empty vessel" filled with the individual's other larger and smaller identities, like gender, class, race, and ethnicity (1969; in Ericksen 1993:217). Like Barth, I believe that these identities are the important linkages articulating local, national, and international identities.

In contrast to the many studies that examine male voices of political leaders in the national arena, my work brings to light the more feminine and multivocalic aspects of identity. This contributes to a growing body of publications, including testimonios, auto-ethnographies, and feminist ethnographies, in which Central American indigenous and ethnic women recount their everyday lives (Alvarado 1989; Burgos-Debray 1984; Gorkin, Pineda, and Leal 2000; Hooks 1993; McClaurin 1996; Randall 1981, 1994; Smith-Ayala 1991). Women's voices emerge, telling us what it means to be Miskito, from the coastal Honduran village of Kuri. My research focuses mainly on the women's perspectives of ethnicity and gender in Kuri, a town administered by women. As a woman, I was privy to the personal stories of the women in a way that I was not with the men. Like others, my study recognizes its

own partial view of reality (Abu-Lughod 1990a, 1991; Behar 1993; Haraway 1988; Knauft 1996; Visweswaran 1997).

Highlighting the Honduran Miskito

Rather than emphasizing the numerically larger and more well-studied Nicaraguan Miskitu, my research is significant because it focuses on the smaller and lesser-known Honduran Miskito population. Their historic homeland--called La Moskitia in Spanish, the Miskito Coast in English, and Moskitia in Miskitu, extends from Black River, Honduras to just south of Bluefields, Nicaragua. Moskitia was divided into two parts after the creation of the Honduran and Nicaraguan states, with about two-thirds of the territory remaining in Nicaragua. The bi-national Miskito peoples present an excellent opportunity to study how ethnicity is differently constructed as a result of living in two different nation-states. Over time, different national and "political identities" (Hale 1997) have developed for Nicaraguan and Honduran Miskitu-speakers. The larger population of Nicaraguan *Miskitu* (145,000) have adopted the more indigenous spelling of their name. Social scientists started using the term *Miskitu* about twenty years ago, a time when the Nicaraguan Miskitu became internationally known as participants in Nicaragua's 1979 revolution and then, later, the US-backed Contra War. The Honduran Miskito (pop. 30,000), on the other hand, have articulated their identity more peacefully within the context of the nation-state. They continue to spell their name with Spanish orthography. The Honduran

Miskito also have worked together with the nation state to create a pluri-ethnic homeland in the RPBR (Herlihy 1997a). Studies of Miskito cultural identity should not only focus on the tumultuous situation in Nicaragua, but also assess how Miskito identity is played out more peacefully in Honduras. By considering both Nicaraguan and Honduran Miskito identities we can more fully understand the collective identity of all Miskitu and Miskito peoples.

Studying the Honduran Miskito has enabled me to fill a lacunae in the ethnographic literature. As I have noted, there is a growing and rich body of scholarship on Nicaraguan Miskitu social organization, economics and subsistence, social identity, belief system, gender, and political development (Adams 1981; Barrett 1992; Bourgois 1981, 1985; Dennis 1981; 1985, 1988; Dennis and Olien 1982, 1984; Diskin 1989, 1991; Falla 1982; Garcia 1996a, 1996b, 1997; Hale 1987a, 1987b, 1994; Helms 1969a, 1969b, 1970, 1971, 1976a, 1977, 1986; Jamieson 1996, 1998, 2000a, 2000b; Nietschmann 1969, 1973, 1974, 1979, 1984, 1989; 1997; Offen 1999; Olien 1983; Vilas 1989). However, social scientists have published little about the contemporary situation of the Miskito peoples of Honduras. Cultural geographers and anthropologists have just begun publishing on the Honduran Moskitia (Badlato 2000; Cruz 1984, 1994; Dodds 1994, 1998, 2001; Herlihy and Herlihy 1991; Herlihy 1993; 1997a, 1997b, 2001; Herlihy 1996a, n.d.; Jefferds 2001; Lara Pinto and Hasseman 1991; McSweeney 2000; Perez Chiriboga 2000; Samson 1997; Tillman 1999). This new generation of work illustrates the distinctiveness of the Miskito peoples in

Honduras and Nicaragua. My study contributes to our understanding of the distinctive nature of ethnic identity among the Honduran Miskito peoples.

Thesis Organization

In chapter two, I introduce the region and its peoples. First, I summarize the culture history of Moskitia, from the arrival of Columbus in 1502 to its reincorporation into the Honduran State in 1860, to the present. This summary is presented chronologically with social history interspersed. Understanding the culture history of Moskitia is important to this study. Many of the reasons why the Miskito have been successful as a people and developed such a strong yet fluid identity began during the colonial era. An historically active coastal economy caused the region to serve as a crossroads between native Amerindians, peoples of African ancestry, Spanish-speaking mestizos (called Ladinos), European businessmen, and various Others. The Miskito peoples are themselves a "hybrid" group: they descend from a local Amerindian group that intermarried with African and European populations, mainly during the sixteenth century. Called "Zambos-Mosquitos" during the colonial epoch, the Miskito became the most expansive culture group residing in Moskitia. Most historians emphasize how the Miskito dominated other peoples by acquiring firearms from the British, which were used to maintain a violent raiding, slaving, and trading economy (Conzemius 1932; Helms 1971; Newson 1986). The social organization of the Miskito also played a role in their territorial expansion. The men

worked away from the villages and women passed down Miskito culture and language to children in matrilocal groups (Helms 1971). While the culture history of Moskitia has been well documented, my recounting of their history is in many ways a feminist revision (Behar and Gordon 1995; di Leonardo 1991), repositioning women as the central force behind Miskito expansion in the colonial and post-colonial periods.

Chapter two also details the settlement history of the Miskito villages along the Plátano reserve's north coast. The first Miskito villages on the Honduran north were settled about 100 years ago. I refer to the Río Plátano Miskito as those who hail from the coastal villages of New Jerusalem, Kuri, Utla Almuk, Tasbapauni, and Barra Plátano, and who share agricultural and hunting lands along the Plátano River. My study of the north coast villages revealed that the Río Plátano Miskito regularly interact with NGOs, Honduran governmental agencies, ethnic Others, and the forces accompanying supralocal economies.

Chapter three presents the theoretical perspectives I employ to situate Miskito identity, placing my study within the context of two theoretical debates in anthropology: 1) identity and ethnicity, and 2) gendered relations of power. My study adopts postmodern constructivists' approaches to identity formation, which I contend does account for the fluid, flexible, and malleable nature of Miskito identities. Specifically, I explore the concept of "situational identity" (Williams 1989) to show how the Miskito people construct various ethnic identities at the local and regional levels. This draws from the social interactionists' (Mead's 1964) view that the

individual's "self" identity is formed during interactions with the "Other." I contend that the Río Plátano Miskito peoples' ethnic identity is created and refashioned through their interactions with neighboring indigenous and ethnic Others within the RPBR. While the notion of situational identity has lost favor as a theoretical approach to ethnicity, I believe it is better suited to the study of Miskito identity than "hybridity," which is a more popular and current approach (Anzaldua 1999; Bhaba 1990; Hicks 1991). Understanding why the Miskito are best viewed through the lens of situational identity and not simply through hybridity, reveals the processual nature of Miskito identity formation within discrete, bounded territories.

Taking my cue from the feminist orientations to culture, my study views women as agents of social change. In so doing, I highlight the Miskito women's strategies to access power and resources in society (Lamphere et. al. 1997). I evaluate the concept of "matrifocality" in an effort to show that Miskito women have a relatively high level of autonomy within an ostensibly patriarchical society (Scott 1995). Miskito women reside in matrilocal groups, often without the daily presence of men. However, as society's main wage earners, men do in fact retain their roles as arbiters of "authority." They work for wages as deep-water lobster divers. I found that an ambiguous gender-power complex exists in coastal villages characterized by both "female autonomy" and "male authority" (Menon 1995). Miskito women, as a result, participate in distinct and often contradictory discourses of gender ideologies. While the discourse of "female autonomy" revolves around women's agentive

capacities in matrigroups; the discourse of "male authority" permeates the lobster-diving economy, which is the mainstay of Miskito livelihood. Miskito women, then, manipulate these discourses of gender ideologies depending on the situation.

My central research problem combines gender theory with instrumentalist and constructivist approaches to ethnicity, in an effort to explore how Miskito individuals use situational identities to gain access to scarce resources in their Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve homeland. The analysis investigates how the control of resources affects the types of identities that Miskito individuals construct within the complex of power and gender. My analysis reveals the situations and contexts in which various Miskito ethnic and gender identities are constructed.

Chapter four presents the methodology and fieldwork context that I draw from to study Miskito ethnic and gender identities at both the regional and local levels. My study is based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation. Over the course of two years in Moskitia, I lived in Kuri and from there traveled to other ethnic groups' villages in the reserve. This chapter begins with a description of how I viewed and filtered the Miskito world as a married, "white" woman. I then present five short stories to contextualize my life as a researcher in the village of Kuri.

My fieldwork was divided into two parts. To study how the Miskito construct their ethnic identity situationally, I study inter-ethnic relations in the broader reserve region. I used interviews and questionnaires, collected ethnic terms of reference that the Miskito call themselves and Others, and surveyed Miskito social status hierarchy

and preferred marriage partners. To study how Miskito women maintain their ethnic identity and how they construct their gender identities situationally at the local level, I studied village social and economic organization. I collected data at the household level on matrilocality and the lobster economy through interviews and questionnaires in Kuri. As windows to understand the distinct discourses of gender ideologies that Miskito individuals participate in during their everyday lives, I studied two highly ritualized speech events used by women and men in Kuri: "buzo lawanka"-- songs that male lobster divers sing about themselves, and "praidey saihka"-- plant-based, supernatural potions which women use to control men. Buzo songs are part of the dominant discourse of "male authority" and praidey saihka potions are part of the subordinate, and often subversive, discourse of "female autonomy."

I worked with one older woman, Doña Meri, to collect and transcribe the praidey saihka recipes, ingredients, incantations, and the reasons women use various types of potions. I also worked with two divers, Wilinton Suarez and Eucevio Guevarra, to collect, interpret, and transcribe songs. The translations were completed in the field working with Doña Meri, Wilinton, and Eucevio. My work defines "ways-of-speaking" among and between Miskito men and women. This is similar to Sherzer's (1983, 1990) study among the Kuna in nearby Panama. The texts of the Miskito incantations and songs will also be of interest to those concerned with the ethno-poetics and verbal art of indigenous peoples in Latin America (Basso 1990; Bauman and Sherzer 1989; Howe 1986; Sammons and Sherzer 2000; Urban 1991).

Because I collect linguistic data to examine both ethnic and gender identities, my work highlights the verbal performance of Miskito ethnic and gender identities. Similar to recent work completed on the representation of Blackness in Latin America (Davies 1999; Moreno 1999; Rahier 1999; Sepúlveda dos Santos 1999; Wade 1999; Whitten and Corr 1999), I emphasize Miskito identity in terms of performance.

Chapter five examines how Miskito individuals construct their identity in the inter-ethnic relations of the broader region. The Río Plátano Miskito live within the northern limits of the RPBR, an internationally designated protected area established nearly a quarter of a century ago. The reserve is pluri-ethnic and the Miskito have frequent exchange encounters and intermarry with the neighboring Tawahka Sumu, Pech, Garífuna (Black Carib), Ladinos, Creoles, and Isleños populations. Miskito individuals, who are often multi-lingual and of mixed ancestries, have a broad range of cultural knowledge and construct situational ethnic identities—they manipulate various markers of identification during interactions with Others.

My research explored ethnic terms of reference that groups use to refer to themselves and Others as important markers of identification (Bonner 1999, 2001; Harris 1963, 1970; Khan 1993; Sanjek 1971, 1977; Southall 1976; Sheriff 1999, 2000; Tonkin, McDonald, and Chapman 1989; Wolf 1982). Prescribing and ascribing ethnic terms are based on a subjective process of assigning ethnic labels to oneself and Others. I present the broad spectrum of ethnic terms in the biosphere reserve to reveal the locally constituted indigenous system of identity. The ethnic

terms of reference I collected also show that the Miskito are referred to by ethnonyms in the reserve. Some ethnic terms stress African ancestry, while others emphasize indigenous descent. The Miskito have malleable, fluid identities because they are a mixed group in a pluri-ethnic region. This creates the social space for them to be many things to many people. Ethnic labels provide us with a window to view the Miskito people's situational use of collective identities. From their point of view, the Miskito's social status hierarchy and preferred marriage partners provide the economic rationale for why they construct situational identities. Miskito individuals, cognizant of the fact that their identities are mobilized instrumentally, gain access to economic and social resources. My analysis explores the situations in which Miskito people manipulate cultural markers to define themselves in relation to neighboring Tawahka, Pech, Garífuna, Ladinos, Creoles, and Isleños in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve.

Village level social organization in Kuri is the focus of chapter six. It explores how Miskito identity is constructed and transmitted in matrilocal family groups. Miskito social organization in the village of Kuri revolves mainly around male-absenteeism and matrilocal residential patterns. A case study of a matrigroup shows that mothers, daughters, and sisters live near each other throughout their lives and create the most important kinship and economic sharing networks in society. Men are often absent from villages as they work in agricultural camps and on lobster boats. While men are gone, women raise their children together and play powerful roles as producers and reproducers of Miskito culture, language, and identity.

My research documents matrilocal residential patterns and high frequency of male absenteeism. As described in the culture history section in chapter two, the colonial Miskito expanded along the coast by passing down Miskito identity in matrigroups while the men were away. Male-absenteeism and matrilocal social organization are also important to document. They reveal the powerful positions Miskito women retain in coastal villages. Matrilocality and male absenteeism are part of a broader group of features of social organization, including regional exogamy, serial monogamy, female-headed households with outside and adopted children, and tracing kinship, descent, and inheritance through the female line that combine to create a matrifocal domestic organization in Kuri (Cole 1991; Gonzalez 1970, 1988; Menon 1995; Prior 1993; Scott 1995; Smith 1956, 1973; Tanner 1974). Thus, village organization in Kuri is not only matrilocal, but largely matrifocal.

Chapter six also shows that in coastal villages like Kuri, the female-centered residential group is largely replacing the kiampka (the traditional patrilineal descent group) as the main descent and socio-economic support group in society. This contrasts with the most complete study of Miskito social organization in the riverine village of Asang. Post-marital residence here was found to be patrilocal (Helms 1971) and matrilocal (Garcia 1996), yet the kiampka functioned as the main kinship group in society. My analysis shows that coastal villages have outside interactions and settlement patterns that create an emphasis on matrilineal village organization. My dissertation presents data showing that coastal Miskito society has matrilocal,

matrifocal, and matrilineal features of village organization. Research reveals that these features combine to create a high level of "female autonomy" for women in Kuri (Dyson and Moore 1983; in Menon 1995).

While chapter six shows Miskito women's high level of "female autonomy" in matrilocal villages, chapter seven demonstrates that men retain their "male authority" as society's main wage earners. Miskito society has long participated in a male-dominant political economy where employment opportunities have historically existed only for men. A strict gendered division of labor exists where men monopolize access to wage earning jobs with foreign companies. For the past thirty years, Miskito men on the reserve's north coast have earned wages as deep-water lobster divers. My analysis illustrates that the coastal economy has institutionalized male dominance in Miskito society. Therefore, the Honduran Miskito peoples' involvement with global economic forces, perhaps even more than the state or church, has created the most institutionalized forms of male patriarchy.

The lobster industry is the latest of many "boom" economies, since the coast was settled over the last century. Even when extractive industries over-exploited resources and left the region, other industries replace them. The prolonged "boom" in the lobster industry has caused locals to develop a heightened physical and psychological dependence on store-bought items and cash. Miskito women's households are increasingly dependent on cash as a resource. Men's power in society is reinforced by the women's desires for cash that only lobster divers can provide.

Chapters six and seven both show that contradictory gender-power relations exist in the village of Kuri: the power that women have in matrilocal groups is contradicted by the male-dominant lobster economy. Women's ability to create and recreate social identities and kinship practices in matrilocal groups establishes their "female autonomy"; and men's access to migrant wage labor fortifies their "male authority." However, migrant wage labor has also exacerbated male absenteeism, and promoted the development of matrilocality.

Chapters eight and nine continue to explore the various gender identities that individuals construct in Kuri. These chapters are separate because they deal with gender, power, and sexuality (Balderston and Guy 1997; Gregor 1985; Gilmore 1990; Jamieson 2000a, 2000b; Lancaster 1988, 1992, 1997) and use socio-linguistic information as primary data. They present and analyze the texts of the songs and incantations I collected. The songs and incantations are primary ingredients of the distinct discourses of gender ideologies that exist in Kuri. Chapter eight illustrates that the discourse of "male authority" is demonstrated in a genre of Miskito music called buzo lawanka (lobster divers' songs). Divers sing these songs about themselves and their adventures. Texts of songs reveal that Miskito manhood is defined by risking ones life in the dangerous diving occupation, killing lobsters to earn money, and participating in the prestige economy of "gifting" rum to other divers. Most significantly, oral texts reveal that Miskito men provide resources (giving cash and store-bought goods) to others in society. The constant boom economy has affected

the construction of gender identities, sexuality, and exchange relations between women and men. A commodification of affection has occurred wherein men pay women a standard sum, called "mairin mana," after sexual relations. This makes up the male-dominant discourse surrounding the buzo economy, where men only have access to inflated wages as deep-water lobster divers.

Texts of other buzo songs show that men perceive women as treacherous and potentially harmful. Men fear everyday women who seduce them and take advantage of them for their money. Men also fear supernatural women like the Miskito goddess, "liwa mairin" (mermaid), who they believe rapes and tries to injure or kill them for extracting too many of her lobsters. From the men's perspective, the mermaid is the quintessential symbol for Miskito women's gendered identity--a powerful, over-sexed, and money-hungry women. Miskito men's demonization of women functions to oppress women who they fear will overturn the patriarchical economic structure in their society. These songs and the beliefs about the liwa mairin that illustrate men's fear of women's sexuality are part of the male-dominant discourse of gender.

As elaborated in chapter nine, the discourse of "female autonomy" is demonstrated in a genre of speech called praidey saihka. Although Miskito women originally used praidey saihka potions for love, they now use them for economic reasons--to beguile lobster-divers into "gifting" women their wages. Praidey saihka is a major form of women's economic empowerment, a strategy that women use to acquire cash from the lobster divers, thus, helping their households survive on the

cash-oriented coast. Because the women utilized these potions to empower themselves vis a vis the men, praidey saihka is part of the women's broader discourse of "magic" that is used to subvert male power (Behar 1987, 1989, 1993; Romanucci-Ross 1993). Women's voices surrounding praidey saihka emerge as a subversive female discourse. They represent the contestation of the male-dominant discourse of gender ideology (Abu-Lughod 1985, 1986, 1990b; Gal 2001; Messick 1987). This all makes up the subordinate, and often subversive, discourse of "female autonomy" that revolves around the women's use of praidey saihka potions.

The dominant discourse of "male authority," prevalent in many buzo songs, is articulated by men and women in public contexts, such as stores, discotheques, and village patios. The subordinate and subversive discourse of "female autonomy," revealed in women's praidey saihka incantations, is spoken by women in the private context of their households and other female-centered domains. Women, then, live in two contradictory worlds and must actively negotiate between at least two competing discourses, one used in everyday contexts, and the other, within the world of mothers, daughters, and sisters. Chapters eight and nine show that Miskito women, through the control of distinct ways-of-speaking, or linguistic heteroglossia (Gal 2001), construct situational identities during interactions with gendered Others. Because women construct their gender identities situationally to gain access to money and other cash-oriented resources, the everyday contestations and negotiations of gender identities play out where women's private voices counter men's public performance of power.

As such, my research also contributes to current anthropological theory by revealing the lived reality in which women and men experience on-going negotiations of power and language (Bucholtz 1999; Bucholtz, Liang, and Sutton 1999; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, 1999; Gal 1991, 1995).

My final chapter discusses the contradictions, contestations, and resolutions in the different Miskito gender and ethnic identities. The Miskito construct various ethnic identities stressing their African, European, and Indian ancestry. Ethnic identity and kinship practices are passed down in matrilocal groups, causing a high level of "female autonomy" for women within a patriarchical society. My conclusions are that Miskito identity is crafted and transmitted to children in matrilocal groups and that Miskito individuals construct situational identities during their interactions with ethnic and gendered Others. Most significantly, Miskito women's various ethnic and gender identities shift back and forth depending on the context at hand to ensure their households' economic survival while also passing down Miskito language and culture to their children. Thus, the situational use of identities among Miskito women may be one of the most significant and strategic social adaptations to living in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve. Río Plátano Miskito identity is strong because of its fluid nature, which allows individuals to construct situational ethnic identities at the regional level and situational gender identities at the local level. The ability to use situational identities, all the while remaining "essentially" Miskito, may be a major reason for the cultural survival of the Honduran Miskito.

Although tied to one village and region, my study shows the linkages between Miskito ethnicity, gender, and more nationally and internationally articulated identities (in Central America, see Babb 2001; Ehlers 2000; Field 1998, 1999; Kane 1994; McClaurin 1996; Tice 1995; Wilk 1999; Wright 1995). The Río Plátano Miskito are residents of the Plátano Biosphere Reserve, a bounded region administered by COHDEFOR, the Honduran forestry agency. The reserve is in many ways replacing the nation-state as the main unit of inter-action between local residents and the outside world. As the Miskito enter into more global discourses of power surrounding conservation and indigenous issues, the ability to manipulate situational identities may prove to be a highly adaptive and successful social skill.

This study contends that the main power that Miskito women have in society is vested in their ability to maintain indigenous cultural practices and social identities (Blackwood 2000; Margolis 1989). My work might be called "ethno-feminism" for it views indigenous women as the primary preservers of nationally and internationally protected resources. Ethno-feminism positions indigenous women as central players in the preservation of much of the world's cultural and linguistic diversity. This is especially important because indigenous cultures and languages are disappearing at an alarming rate today. As the Río Plátano Miskito enter more global discourses of conservation and indigenous issues, Miskito women may become empowered as conservators of their cultural and linguistic resources within the boundaries of this internationally protected region (Herlihy 1996a).

Chapter Two: The Historical Setting

Lowland Central America extends along the Caribbean (or Atlantic) Coast and the inland rainforests of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. The Caribbean coastal zone from Nicaragua to Belize, including Moskitia, is characterized by cultural diversity. For example, Garífuna, Maya (K'ekchi, Mopan, and Yucatecan), Creoles, Ladinos, East Indians, Lebanese, and Chinese peoples live together in Belize (Cosminsky 1976; Gonzalez 1988; Staiano 1986); the Miskito, Tawahka Sumu, Pech, Garífuna, Creole, Ladino and other Bay Islanders (Isleños) live together in the Honduran Moskitia (Conzemius 1932; Herlihy and Herlihy 1991); the Miskito, Twahka, Ulwa, Rama, Garífuna, Creoles, and mestizos live together in the Nicaraguan Mosquitia (Barrett 1992; CIDCA 1982, 1987; Conzemius 1932; Helms 1971; Nietschmann 1969, 1973; Parsons 1955); and European and North American entrepreneurs live dispersed over the entire area. Similar examples can be given for the Atlantic slopes of Costa Rica and Panama (Herlihy 1997b).

Central America's "Caribbean edge" (Nietschmann 1979), or "rimland" (Augelli 1962) is culturally unique in Latin America. This coastal stretch of land remained largely outside of Hispanic influences throughout the colonial era and was influenced more by Anglo/Protestant forces--first as a British Protectorate, then by the Moravian missionaries, and later by North American and other foreign business enterprises (Conzemius 1932; Helms 1971; Nietschmann 1973). Indeed, English

became the prestige language on the coast as early as the 17th century when Protestant Euro-Americans and English-speaking Blacks began to settle on the coast (Holm 1978; Parsons 1954).[1]

The territory and population of the Miskito peoples have expanded since the 16th century. From their original location at Cabo Gracias a Dios in the 1630s, the Miskito grew to control an area spanning from Cabo Camarón in Honduras to Río Wawa in Nicaragua by the early 1700s (Conzemius 1932:13). A few decades later, they controlled the lands between Río Tinto in Honduras to the Río San Juan in Nicaragua (Naylor 1989:27-45). This region, for the most part, still remains the territory of the Miskito peoples today. The Miskito population has also expanded. In the early 1700s, M.W. (1732:285-298) reported the "Mosqueto-men" numbered 1000. Less than one hundred years later, White (1789:46) reported that they numbered 7,000. Today, the population has grown to around 175,000, one of the biggest indigenous groups in Central America. The goal of the culture history section is to understand how the Miskito population, called "Zambos-Mosquitos" during the colonial era, expanded their territory and population to emerge as the most formidable ethnic group in Moskitia.

Culture History of the Honduran Moskitia

In the following sections, I summarize the culture history of Moskitia, including the emergence and hey-day of the colonial Zambos-Mosquitos, the British presence on the Honduran shore, the arrival of the Garífuna, and the subsequent transformation of the Zambos-Mosquitos into the modern-day Miskito.

1502-1700: The Emergence of the Zambos-Mosquitos

Columbus was the first to document indigenous people along the Honduran Coast in 1502, during his fourth and final trip to the "New World." However, it is not clear which indigenous group he encountered. Macro-Chibchan-speaking Amerindian groups that were greatly influenced by northern South American Chibchan peoples occupied the Caribbean Lowlands in the pre-Columbian era (Stone 1966; Chapman 1958). Ethno-historians agree that the Pech people, then called Paya, resided up the Plátano, Paulaya, and Wampu Rivers at this time. The Pech, however, would later be displaced in the 18th century by the aggressive colonial Miskito peoples, called Zambos-Mosquitos. (Herlihy and Herlihy 1991).

The Miskito trace their ancestry to the mid-17th century when Amerindian women residing at Cape Gracias a Dios married men of various ancestries and ethnicities, including the British, other Europeans, mulattos, and Black slaves. Helms (1976b:9) said of the Miskito:

> These so-called Indians are a biologically mixed people originating during the colonial period from miscegenation between indigenous women of eastern Nicaragua and British settlers, buccaneers, and especially Negro freeman and slaves who sought the isolated shore as refugees from Spanish and West Indian colonies or were brought to the coast as laborers by English planters.

The mixed Indian men began a pattern of leaving their coastal settlements for work as early as the latter half of the 17th century and continuing throughout the colonial period (Helms 1971). Pirate and buccaneer vessels took them to sea to provide for the sustenance of the Europeans. Exquemelin (1981:182) reported,

> These Indians are a great asset to the rovers, as they are very good harpoonists, extremely skilful in spearing turtles, manatees and fish. In fact, an Indian is capable of keeping a whole ship's company of 100 men supplied with food, when he is in a place where there's something to catch.

Later, the British militia took Miskito men with them to fight the Spanish to the west. Because of male absenteeism in villages, the Miskito began to live matrilocally, where groups of consanguineally related women lived together without men (Helms 1971:23-26; Newson1986:283). Matrilocality became a highly successful way to pass on what Helms called "proto-Miskito" culture and language to children without men present on a daily basis (Helms 1971).

Matrilocality worked well locally to pass on Miskito identity not only when the men were not there, but also because Miskito women often married men from outside of their ethnic group. Ethno-historians Helms (1971) and Conzemius (1932)

believe intermarriage with other ethnic groups and matrilocal organization characterized Miskito society from the 17th through the 19th century.

During the 17th century, the Honduran Miskito probably pushed the Sumu (today called Tawahka Sumu) up the Coco, the Wampu, and the Patuca Rivers (Herlihy and Herlihy 1991). The Sumu at first tried to fight back by waging counter-attacks against the outlying Zambo-Mosquito villages. The Zambos-Mosquitos, however, were an unbeatable force in the region. Even more important than warfare, the Zambos-Mosquitos dominated the Sumu by the process of miscegenation, intermarrying with and assimilating them to their culture.[2]

Miskito women frequently married men from other ethnic groups, raising their mixed offspring to be culturally Miskito. Conzemius (1932:13) stated that the children of mixed-Miskito parents, "always speak the language of the mother and grow up as Miskito." The goal of my work is to demonstrate, from a feminist and post-modern perspective, that what we are observing in Kuri and the reserve today is not new, but a modern expression of historic Miskito social organization and identity.

1700-1800: Hey-Day of the Zambos-Mosquitos

Indian women continued to intermarry with Blacks that arrived on the shore at the beginning of the 18th century (Helms 1971, 1977:158-159; Holm 1978:186; Parson 1956; Squier 1965). In 1710, Holm (1978:186) reports that 900 Blacks were brought from Ghana, Gambia, Togo, and Benin that united with the Zambos-

Mosquitos. Negro and Indian miscegenation, then, was well underway by the early 1700's and their descendants were known as "Zambos-Mosquitos" or just "Zambos."

The Zambos-Mosquitos had formed a military alliance with the British who gave them firearms to fight against the Spanish. They used these weapons to dominate the other groups in Moskitia, especially the Pech (called Paya) and the Tawahka Sumu. The Zambos-Mosquitos pushed the Paya and the Sumu groups down the coast and up nearby rivers. The Paya, who had only primitive arms, could not defend themselves against the frequent raids of the musket-wielding Zambos-Mosquitos (Conzemius 1932:277). The last battle where the Zambos-Mosquitos defeated the Paya was in 1720, and after this, the Zambos-Mosquitos demanded payments in tribute from the Paya, such as cattle and crops, especially maize, and sarsaparilla (Newson 1986: 273-274). The Paya would often steal these items from the inland Spanish because the Zambos-Mosquitos would take Paya women, children, and entire households if their tribute demands were not met (Naylor 1989:41).

Both their military and economic alliances with the British caused the Zambos-Mosquitos to emerge as a formidable ethnic group. They dominated other indigenous and Black groups in the region from 1700-1800 through their raiding, slaving, and trading economy. Basically, the Zambos-Mosquitos expanded their territory and population by displacing other ethnic groups from their lands, subordinating them economically, and marrying them (Nietschmann 1969:91-103).

The Zambos-Mosquitos continued to intermarry with the Paya, Sumu, and other Blacks that assimilated to their dominant culture and language (Conzemius 1932:82-87; Helms 1971:20-21, 1976b:14-17).[3] The Paya, Sumu, and Blacks (many of whom were escaping slavery), willingly intermarried with the Zambos-Mosquitos and learned their language. This was mainly for economic reasons. They wanted to have trade relations with the British and to acquire European trade goods (Conzemius 1932:12-13; Hale 1987a:37-38, 33-59). Only by being Zambo-Mosquito could one serve as a trade intermediary between the British and the local Indians, ethnic groups, and Spanish frontier settlements. Thus, the Zambos-Mosquitos secured a higher socio-economic status than other indigenous and ethnic groups on the coast.

Helms (1976b:9) believes that the Zambos-Mosquitos purposefully accentuated their ethnic differences with the region's other "Indians" by marrying Blacks and taking "Indian" slaves. By being different than the other Indigenous groups, the Zambos-Mosquitos guaranteed their role as culture broker and economic middleman between the British and the locals in Moskitia. This relates to my study because it shows how the Miskito individuals strategically used their mixed identity for their personal economic advancement.

The British Presence on the Miskito Coast

Beginning in the mid-17th century, the British employed their colonial policy of indirect rule over the region and created a political system modeled after their own-

-even designating a native "King of Mosquitia" (Helms 1971:20). Their influence became formalized on the coast in 1660 after the first Miskito King, Oldman, was crowned in England (M.W. 1732:288). The British attempted to make their presence on the Miskito Coast legal in the eyes of the Spanish and other European powers by creating the Miskito monarchy. Gonzalez (1988:52) said:

> Using imposed indirect rule on them, the British supplied the Miskitos with arms and ammunition that created a Miskito monarchy patterned somewhat after their own, in which each succeeding hereditary "king" of the Miskito was ceremoniously crowned by the British King's representative, either in Jamaica or Belize.

Scholars disagree as to whether Miskito kings were pawns used by the British, or whether they had real authority. Helms believes Miskito kings were like what E.G. Squier called, "puppets" of the British (Dennis and Olien 1984:726). Helms (1971:20) asserts that Miskito kings had no real power, but were used by the English to assist in their economic interests and contraband trade with the Spanish frontier. Dennis and Olien (1984), however, disagree. They believe the Miskito Kingdom had an internal centralized political system.[4] The Miskito kingship lasted until 1860 when Nicaragua and Honduras reincorporated the region, and thereafter, the kings became known as chiefs. However, the chiefs continued to centralize Miskito power for another thirty years (Dennis and Olien 1984).[5]

The British influence was greatest on the coast from the founding of Black River in 1730 to the Treaty of Versailles in 1783 (and the related Anglo-Spanish

Convention of 1786). British settlements on the coast were established in 1730 at Black River, Cape Gracias, and Bluefields. The best known and the largest fortified settlement was Black River, built by the British government. The Miskito, originally brought to Black River by the British, spread along the Honduran shore. They then settled from Río Tinto (Black River) to Cape Gracias a Dios within the next few decades (Edwards 1819) and Ibans and Brus Lagoon by the late 18th century (Herlihy and Herlihy 1991).

The founder of Black River was William Pitt, a respected landowner who held control over the settlement for forty years. He had slaves and maintained good relations with the Zambos-Mosquitos and other Indians in the region (Naylor 1989:51). Black River was a small agricultural colony and British settlers built plantations of sugarcane, cotton, and cacao, cut mahogany, had livestock, and traded with the Paya, the Sumu, Zambos-Mosquitos, and, illicitly, with the interior Spanish (Hale 1987a:33-57; Naylor 1989:39-45).

In 1740, Black River became the capital seat of the British government on the Miskito Coast. Black River soon had a fort, an army of 100 British troops, and its first Superintendent, Robert Hodgson. The year 1749 legally established the British Protectorate and the first British Superintendency on the coast, which lasted until 1760 (Sorsby 1972:145-53). Black River became the main British settlement on the Central American Caribbean Coast throughout the colonial period, serving as the administrative center for the British Superintendency. Robert Hodgson reported the

settlement to have a population of 154 whites, 170 mestizos and mulattos, and 800 Indians and Negros (including Zambos-Mosquitos) in the 1750s (Naylor 1989:51).[6] While Superintendent Hodgson had de jure power in front of the English throne, his decisions were based on those made by magistrates under Pitt's de facto control.

During Hodgson's superintendency in the mid 18th century, probably only twenty to thirty other Englishmen were settled along the Mosquito Coast outside of Black River. They served as trade intermediaries exchanging sarsaparilla and tortoise shell between the Indians, Jamaican traders, and Spanish settlers on the mainland. British citizens lived and married among the Zambos-Mosquitos in remote locations, such as Brewers Lagoon, Plantain River,[7] and, just east of Black River, in Mestee Creek (Mousti Creek). Some lived in these remote locales in order to operate their business enterprises outside of any governmental controls (Naylor 1989:39-63).

The Spanish tried in 1763--with the Treaty of Paris--and, again, in 1783--with the related Treaty of Versailles to remove the British from the shore. Finally, the Anglo-Spanish Convention in 1786 forced the British to pull out of Black River (Floyd 1967:169; Pim 1869:312). After the British evacuated, the Spanish could not attract settlers mainly due to the presence of the infamous Zambos-Mosquitos, known for being hostile towards them (Gonzalez 1988:53; Laird 1970:9; Newson 1986:257). The Zambos-Mosquitos' friendly relations with the British and total rejection and hatred of the Spanish were their defining feature during the colonial era.

1800-1860s: The Arrival of the Garífuna and the Emergence of Miskito Identity

The Garífuna (which is a term referring to both their language and ethnic group) population reached the Honduran Moskitia in the early 1800s. The Garífuna speak an Arawakian-based language and are native to the Caribbean Island of St. Vincent. Here, Black African slaves mixed with Carib Indians to produce a coherent hybrid culture known as "Black Carib" or Garífuna. Because they were rebellious on St. Vincent, the British authorities banished 2,000 Garífuna to the Bay Island of Roatán in 1797 (off the Honduran coast). The Spaniards brought them to the mainland at Trujillo from where they spread along the coast reaching Black River in 1820, the historic Miskito-Garífuna cultural boundary (Davidson 1976, 1979, 1983, 1984). The Garífuna settled near the mouth of the Río Patuca in 1804, but retreated shortly after to the Black River area. Plaplaya, the present easternmost Garífuna settlement in Honduras (just within the reserve's northwestern boundary), formed at the end of the 19th century (Herlihy and Herlihy 1991).

Although the Zambos-Mosquitos were perceived as Europeanized Blacks in the 18th century, Helms (1977:162-165) described how they commonly became known as "Mosquito Indians" or "Indios Mosquitos" by the mid 19th century. After the British abolished the slave trade in 1807 (and slavery in 1833-1835), a labor shortage ensued on the coast that caused plantation owners to hire local workers for wage labor (Gonzalez 1988:55). The Creoles and Black Caribs took these plantation

jobs and became the major wage-earning populations on the shore—they displaced the Zambos-Mosquitos in the Honduran coast's social hierarchy and became known for being better laborers. Because the Miskito did not make the transition easily from raider and trader to day laborer, the British more readily hired Black Caribs and Creoles who they respected as hard workers. (Gonzalez 1988; Hale 1987a; Helms 1977; Naylor 1989).

Gonzalez (1988:132) claimed:

> As the different Zambo-Mosquito factions increasingly fought among themselves for an illusory throne and empire, the Caribs gradually came to replace them in most parts of the labor market.

The British began to perceive the Black Caribs and Creoles as the most civilized groups on the coast, mainly because they both spoke English and participated in colonial economies. The Zambos-Mosquitos, who had once been valued and liked by the British for having civilized ways, were now perceived as being backwards, primitive, and not following European culture. The British claimed the Zambos-Mosquitos were naked and constantly requesting rum, and they earned "a reputation for surliness, drinking and unreliability" (Gonzalez 1988:129-134, 198-200). As one explorer observed (Baraud 1947:336; in Gonzalez 1988:132-33):

> As the Miskito changed from fierce warrior and entrepreneurial raider and trader during the 17th and 18th century to that of backward and harmless savage in the 19th, the Caribs established reputation and continuing behavior patterns allowed them first to fill the "fierce" role and then to move steadily into other roles that were more respectable in Europeans eyes. They became known as industrious, intelligent, temperate, and reliable laborers and accounts increasingly used the term "civilized, by which was meant Christian, fully clothed, fluent in a European language, and sometimes literate.

By the 1820s, the Creoles and the Black Caribs displaced the Zambos-Mosquitos as the most socially and economically dominant ethnic groups on the coast (Gonzalez 1988:55-56; Hale 1987a:33-43).

With the emergence of the Black Carib and Creole social identities in the 1800's, the Zambos-Mosquitos were also replaced as the most Negroid or Black group on the coast from the Europeans' perspective. The Creoles and Black Caribs also continued to add more African components to their populations through intermarriage with other Blacks, while the Zambos-Mosquitos in Honduras married Pech (Paya) and Tawahka (Sumu) Indians. Over time, the Creoles and Black Caribs become known for being Europeanized Blacks while the Zambos-Mosquitos were considered backwards Indians. The Zambos-Mosquitos became known as "Mosquito Indians" by the mid 1800s. Then over the next fifty years, the term "Zambos-Mosquitos" was eliminated completely in legal usage (Helms 1977:164).

Helms (1977) shows that the colonial Zambos-Mosquitos racial and ethnic identity began to change in the 19th century and they gradually became more

identified as Indians than Blacks in their cultural patterns and racial identity.[8] However, Newson (1986:22) reports that the Honduran sector of the population was still thought of as a mixed Negroid group at the time of Central American Independence in 1823:

> As a mixed racial group the Zambos-Mosquitos as a whole cannot be classified as Indians any more than mestizos, and this is particularly true for the Honduran sector of the Shore, where the negro influence was strongest. As such, the Zambos-Miskitos are not regarded as Indians at the end of the colonial period.

Based on the information presented above by Roberts (1827), Naylor (1989) and Newson (1986), it appears that the Honduran Miskito may have retained their colonial social and racial identity as Zambos-Mosquitos (a mixed Negroid population that dominated others by raiding and trading) up until the time of Independence in 1823. By the 1850s, however, Helms (1977:162-165) claims that all of the people formerly known as Zambos-Mosquitos were being referred to as "Miskito Indians" in common and legal usage.

Both the Miskito and Garífuna are mixed Amerindian and African peoples, live on the Miskito Coast, and intermarried with Others. However, the Miskito are today thought of as being more Indian than the Garífuna, who are associated with African descent (Helms 1977:169-170). As stated above, the Garífuna intermarried mostly with other Blacks and developed more Negroid features, while the Miskito, who varied in physical appearance, also intermarried with the indigenous Pech and Tawahka Sumu. Loveland and Helms (1976:85-86; in Gonzalez 1959) state,

> In spite of similar origins the Miskito are usually today viewed as Indians (although the term Zambo, referring to an Indian-Negro admixture, was often applied by Spanish-speakers during the colonial period), while the Black Caribs are frequently considered an Afro-American population. A number of factors are responsible for this contrasting identification, not the least of which is the possibly greater degree of African admixture in the Black Carib population and the greater retention of African elements in Black Carib folklore, religion, and music.

Hoetink (1985) believes that the Caribbean is a rich environment to study race relations. Here, new types of peoples were formed after the Africans peopled the Americas: Black African slaves, free Black men trying to escape the oppressive Spanish society, and West Indian Blacks who had previously worked on plantations intermarried with Amerindian peoples and also with European colonists. This Afro-Anglo-Indigenous "New World" miscegenation created the groups today known as the Miskito and Garífuna and then they both expanded in population and territory on the Honduran Atlantic Coast. (Conzemius 1932:12-14; Davidson 1984:13-35; Gonzalez 1988:51-74; Helms 1971:11-25; Nietschmann 1973:23-39).

The Miskito and the Garífuna, whose culture areas meet at Black River, are today two of the most successful groups on the Honduran Caribbean Coast and in Central America. While other indigenous groups in the region, such as the Paya and Tawahka Sumu, decreased in size and lost their lands, both the Miskito and the

Garífuna have grown in numbers and expanded in territory during the colonial and post-colonial eras. The Garífuna, for example, expanded from 200 to 80,000 in only 180 years (Crawford 1984, 1986). Many scholars contend that the success of the Miskito and Garífuna in the region is based on their highly adaptive forms of social organization (Crawford 1984,1986; Helms 1976b; Loveland and Helms 1976). Both the Miskito and the Garífuna absorbed other population components by marrying outside of the ethnic group and living matrilocally. Miskito and Garífuna (Black Carib) women married men of other ethnic groups[9] and passed down their own language and culture to the children in female-centered residential groups (Conzemius 1932; Crawford 1984; Kerns 1984; Helms 1971). Matrilocality allowed groups of related women to raise their children together while the men were typically away in migrant wage labor activities (Helms 1970, 1971, 1976a). Therefore, marrying outside one's ethnic group, living matrilocally, and transmitting ethnicity through the female line may have been successful social adaptations to the coastal economy during the colonial and post-colonial eras.

In the post-colonial era, after the British had pulled off of the coast, Gonzalez (1988), Hale (1987a), and Helms (1977) all report that the Miskito peoples lost their dominance and power in the region. This was due, of course, to the arrival of the Garífuna and the newly emerging Creole, or English-speaking Blacks who were considered better laborers than the Miskito. However, Roberts contradicts this,

claiming that the Honduran Miskito remained in control of their region and kept up elevated life styles as raiders and traders (Roberts 1827). Roberts (1827:97) says that even without a British or Spanish Colonial presence, the Zambos-Mosquitos in Honduras continued to dominate and oppress the local Sumu, Paya, mulattos, and free and enslaved Blacks during the 19th century. Naylor (1989:71-72) also claims that the region between Black River and Cabo Gracias a Dios where Miskito-Sambo General Tempest and General Robinson reigned remained controlled and dominated by the Zambos-Mosquitos.

General Robinson, General Tempest's son (Offen 1999), lived at Río Plátano and had an English style house, Indian and Black slaves, cattle, and traded sarsaparilla with the interior Paya. Robinson controlled the area between Black River (Río Aguan) and the Patuca including the newly arrived Garífuna, then called "Black Carib." In the 1840's, however, the Miskito population along the Honduran coast was reduced due to a smallpox epidemic, and by 1860, when Moskitia was reincorporated into the Honduran state, there were only five or six hamlets that existed between Río Tinto (Black River) and Plátano (Herlihy and Herlihy 1991).

Settlement History of North Coast Villages

Interviews conducted by the researcher with ten Miskito elders, four Garífuna elders, two Pech elders, and one Creole elder reveal the settlement history of the north coast villages over the last one hundred years. The earliest coastal settlement in the

reserve is Plaplaya, a Garífuna village, occupied in the latter half of the 19th century. Other coastal Miskito villages, Barra Plátano, Cocobila, and Ibans were settled about 100 years ago and expanded during the early 20th century (see Figure 1.2). By the 1920s, Barra Plátano, Cocobila, and Ibans grew larger and hamlets developed in Utla Almuk and, then, in Kuri. Plaplaya, the Garífuna village, grew larger and Europeans settled there and in Payabila and Platubila.[10] The Pech had moved nearer to the coast, having moved down from the Plátano headwaters to settle the Las Marías area.

The United Fruit Company (UFC) worked on the Plátano and Paulaya-Sico Rivers and in the mountainous Baltimore region by the early 1900s. The United Fruit Company had a major impact in Moskitia and many Miskito and other indigenous, Black, and European men worked for the company as wage laborers, supervisors, and company heads. Alton Bruner, a North American director for the UFC, had his "cocal" (coconut plantation) in Cocobila. He also opened the region's first store and lived in Jaloba, a neighborhood in Plaplaya where La Criba meets the Paulaya River. The Miskito, Pech, Tawahka, and others traveled great distances to acquire western goods from his store. Here, indigenous and ethnic exchange encounters occurred, creating the culturally plural social milieu in the economic hub of Moskitia.

To reach Bruner's store, the Pech from the Las Marías area descended the Río Plátano into Miskito territory to the stretch near Liwa Raya, where they would leave their pipantes (canoes). The Pech believed, along with the Miskito, that a treacherous mermaid (liwa mairin) dwelled underwater at the river's bend near Liwa Raya. This

mermaid, they believed, can turn over their canoes, make them sick, or kill them if they pass the bend where she lives. Local stories explain how the mermaid first lived near the Pech settlement of Kiajkimina before moving down-river to Liwa Raya in the early 1900s. Verses of the following song, "Liwa Mairin" recant how a shaman (or "sukia") named Mikitrik twice exorcised the water spirit by swimming her out to sea. I collected this song from a diver named Wilinton Suarez, a Kuri man and lobster diver that claims to be a descendant of the infamous shaman Mikitrik.

Liwa Mairin/Mermaid

Mermaid, beautiful woman
you were doing harm to the town
near Kiajkimina
Mermaid
a man was born
his name was Mikitrik
Mermaid

Mikitrik was the man
he was called a strong man
Mermaid
he searched for a powerful way
among the town's people
Mermaid

In Río Plátano
there was a big problem
the Pech couldn't cross
many people couldn't cross
Mermaid
Mikitrik went up-river
and he did great work
Mermaid

He kicked you out of your place
but you went down below
to the place of Liwa Raya
you were then harming this place
Mermaid

Mikitrik came up (to Liwa Raya)
he looked for another way
Mikitrik came up
he talked to the town's people
Mermaid

Mikitrik exorcised you
just like that he did it to you
he took you out to the sea
Mermaid[11]

When the mermaid lived in Liwa Raya, the Pech walked overland through monte to the north shore of Ibans Lagoon and then around the lagoon to reach Payabila. The Pech traded gold dust (panned up-river) with a North American dentist who lived in Payabila for the use of his canoes. They then crossed Ibans Lagoon by canoe to reach Bruner's store. Many believe Payabila (literally, the place of the Pech) was named after the Pech who frequently arrived there to rent boats that they took to Bruner's store. [12]

The first Miskito settlements on the north coast, Cocobila and Barra Plátano, each had stores, a schools, and a Moravian church. The land between Kuri and Cocobila was monte and pedestrians traveled between Barra Plátano and Cocobila along the beach. The Moravian Reverend Heath, who lived in Cocobila, walked back and forth to Barra Plátano to give Sunday service. Today the monte has been entirely

cleared and is called the "llano" or "twi" (open savanna) where new settlements have developed in recent decades.

Belén (east of Cocobila with 59 households and 353 individuals) formed in 1947 when some Miskito residents left the crowded Cocobila settlement to clear monte to the east. New Jerusalem, between Belén and Kuri, with 73 households and 438 individuals--was not settled until 1982. Miskito families left Barra Plátano to settle New Jerusalem after their homes were washed away by the changing course of the Plátano River. Since then, New Jerusalem has expanded due to the arrival of more residents from Rio Plátano and other nearby coastal villages. New Jerusalem's Buenos Aires neighborhood now reaches the easternmost houses of Belén.

While Cocobila was originally the most developed community on the coastal strip, Belén now has more communication and transportation networks with the outside world. MOPAWI (Moskitia Pawisa), the local NGO that works on reserve management, has an office and an experimental butterfly farm here. There are also guesthouses and small restaurants that attract eco-tourists. The Evangelical Missionaries' Clinic and hardware store and an airfield for Moskitia flights (established in 1981) are also found in Belén.

The Moravian Hospital in Ahuas offers an airline service, "Alas de Socorro" (Wings of Emergency), that flies debilitated, injured, and sickly Miskito people to Ahuas free of charge. Family members commonly escort infirmed Miskito people to the airfield in Belén. Today, this airfield has an adjoining structure with a two-way

radio, and is bounded by a fairly large elementary school, a comedor (small restaurant), and two of the largest houses in the village. One house belongs to Donaldo Allen, a teacher and indigenous leader; the other belongs to a married couple that works with a British religious-based organization called Tear Fund and MOPAWI. Moskitia pilots know that they need to swoop down once to clear the cows from the airstrip of pasture grasses before circling back to land their Cessnas. Daily gossip about whom arrived and left from Belén filled conversations along the reserve's north coast.

The Río Plátano Miskito

In the Moskitia today, when people refer to the "Río Plátano Miskito," they are talking about the Miskito families who live in the villages of New Jerusalem, Kuri, Utla Almuk, Tasbapauni, and Barra Plátano (east to west). These villages share agricultural lands up the Plátano River and the major transportation and communication networks.[13] Besides the beach and village paths, a man-made canal links the Río Plátano Miskito to each other. This is actually a network of canals and lagoons extending from the eastern edge of Ibans Lagoon to the Plátano River,[14] connecting the Río Plátano Miskito villages with their agricultural and hunting lands. Prior to digging the canal in the early 1980s, canoe traffic from the river only reached Tasbapauni. In those days, families from Utla Almuk and Kuri had to walk overland to haul riverine produce to their homes.

Kuri is tied most closely with the two beachfront villages directly to its east, Utla Almuk, and Tasbapauni. During the rainy season (from June to December), the Tampa Tigni Lagoon behind the villages usually cuts an outlet to the sea. Kuri, Utla Almuk, and Tasbapauni form an Island bounded by the lagoon to the west, Río Plátano to the east, the Caribbean sea to the north, and the man-made canal system to the south. To arrive to the seasonal island, locals cross Tampa Tigni Lagoon or the Plátano River by water "taxi," paying one or two "Lempiras" (the national currency; two are about 15 cents) to be crossed in canoe. Residents of these villages are not only linked together by geographic challenges, but also through kinship and reciprocity networks. Children roam freely between villages and a family atmosphere prevails. The Plátano Miskito also travel frequently to the accessible villages of Belén, Cocobila, and Ibans (Cocobila-Ibans) to the west. Walking along the savanna path or twi, the locals stop to talk to friends and visit several villages along the way. The constant travel between villages creates a busy by-way. These are the Río Plátano Miskito villages. They are linked to the outside world mainly through their connections with two of the region's largest towns--Brus Laguna and Palacios.

Brus Laguna

Brus Laguna[15] (in Spanish) is the largest Miskito settlement on the Honduran Coast. Called "Brus" and "Brus Lagun" by the Miskito, the town serves as the administrative capital for Río Plátano Miskito, as part of the municipality of the same

name established by the Honduran state. To reach Brus, the Río Plátano Miskito walk along the coast from Barra Plátano to reach an historic fishing camp on the "barra" (sand bar) of a giant fresh-water lagoon. Then, they cross the lagoon in a motorized cayuco to reach the village. The Río Plátano Miskito travel to Brus to vote, get married, register lands, and to see government officials, among other reasons. They also occasionally travel through Brus en route to Barra Patuca, the second largest Honduran Miskito settlement (pop. 1,811), where they visit friends, relatives, or seek traditional healers. They also travel through Brus when ascending the Río Patuca in canoe, often to reach Ahuas, where the Moravian center of religious studies and Moravian hospital are located.

Palacios

Palacios sits just west of Black River, on an inlet from the sea overlooking the mouth of the Black River. Palacios functions as a border town between interior Honduran cities and the north coast of the Plátano reserve. Many businesses and organizations are located here, including the national Isleña airline; the office of AFE-COHDEFOR, the Honduran government's agency that manages the reserve; two missionary groups--the Bahai and Evangelical Pentecostals--each with their own health centers and doctors; and an elementary and secondary school. There are also many "truchas" (stores) and "bodegas" (bars), two semi-modern hotels, eco-tourist agencies, tour guides, and a gift shop housed in an aesthetically pleasing bamboo hut.

The Palacios airfield lands Isleña planes twice a day (except Sunday) and, at times, an old DC 3 owned by the evangelical missionary group. Palacios also has historic import as the site of the British fort, Black River. Today, relics of canons used to protect Black River during the eighteenth century and the grave (and ghost) of its de facto leader, William Pitt, can still be found.

Don Felix, the local Ladino patriarch, does not look like anyone of means. Yet, he owns forestlands, cattle, the local Isleña airline office with a two-way radio, and a fish marketing industry, and much, much, more. Born nearby, he has made himself into a wealthy Honduran businessman. He also recently completed a two-story, cement hotel to accommodate nationals who work in the region, eco-tourists, and locals with money (the politicians, schoolteachers, storeowners, and tour guides). Each hotel room has a double bed, a shower, toilet, and basin. Electric generators provide electricity throughout much of the evening. His daughter Anna runs a busy comedor, between the airline office and the hotel, where hotel guests and Isleña pilots eat daily. Don Felix's son has a relatively fancy bar with a large selection of alcoholic beverages (including mainly rums and beers), twenty-five yards or so beyond the hotel. Don Felix's accommodations also boast the sounds of the nearby rainforest's howler monkeys in the wee-morning hours and superb sunsets over the infamous and sometimes treacherous mouth of Black River.

Very few Miskito families reside in Palacios, a mixed Ladino and Garífuna town. The Miskito especially dislike Ladino men because they stole and destroyed

historic Miskito territory in the rain forest. Many Ladino men owned cattle ranches up the Paulaya River and walked around Palacios in cowboy hats, boots, and jeans, while flashing their gold chains and capped teeth. In spite of the fact that the Plátano Miskito people try to avoid Ladinos, they were forced to interact with them here. Palacios remains the main route in and out of this part of Moskitia to interior Honduran cities. Although a road to Sico nearly connects Palacios with interior Honduran networks, most Plátano Miskito traveled with Isleña airlines from Palacios to La Ceiba or Tegucigalpa.

This chapter introduces the Miskito as a people by showing how the Miskito peoples became a dominant force in the Honduran Moskitia during the colonial era. Although ethnohistorians report that inter-ethnic marriage, matrilocality, and passing down language and culture through the female line characterized the Miskito during the colonial era, no study has ever detailed this in a modern-day setting. Therefore, my study serves as a present-day example to show how the Miskito expanded along the coast during the colonial era and emerged as a formidable ethnic group. More pertinent to this dissertation's analytical perspective, it also reveals the uniquely feminine process of ethnicization that occurs among the Río Plátano Miskito peoples.

Notes to Chapter Two

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1. John Holm reports that English continues to be the most prestigious language on the coast today, although Spanish is taught in all of Central America's national schools (Holm 1978:326-328 in Dennis and Olien 1984:734) except Belize.

2. The Zambos-Mosquitos, by using their new weapons, conquered the Tawahka Sumu and the Paya in Honduras, made them their subjects, and demanded that they pay tribute, usually in the form of forest resources. Although this caused the Paya and the Tawahka Sumu to be, for the most part, mortal enemies with the Zambos-Mosquitos during the colonial period, there were often shifting regional alliances between the groups. The Zambos-Mosquitos would sometimes ally themselves with the Sumu or the Paya against the Spanish, especially in reaction to the Spaniard's attempt to put them into missions--the Spanish governmental policy called for "reducciones" of all the Indian groups of La Mosquitia. At other times, the Paya and Spanish would ally themselves against the Zambos-Mosquitos and the English. All the while, however, the Paya, Sumu, and Spanish were forced to trade with the Zambos-Mosquitos--the economic middlemen--to acquire European trade goods they valued. (Conzemius 1927:255; Hale 1987a:37.)

3. Later, Bell (1862: 258) observed entire Sumu villages that went through a process of assimilation to Miskito culture and language.

4. The Miskito King, they report, was at the center of the slaving, raiding, and trading economy, especially from 1750-1800. At this time, Miskito raids increased on other Indian and Spanish settlements to the west (Dennis and Olien 1984:722).

5. Dennis and Olien (1984:718, 730-731; see also Dozier 1985) also said that celebrations still exist that ritually reenact the days of Miskito Kings on the Nicaraguan Coast today. The authors believe the underlying significance of these rituals is that the Miskito were happier with English-speaking, rather than Spanish-speaking, foreigners.

6. Others estimate that there were 200 Englishmen and 700 Blacks cultivating tobacco and sugarcane in the early 1760s. However, West and Augelli (1989:283) claim that there were never over 200 whites on the entire Mosquito Coast throughout the eighteenth century.

7. Naylor (1989: 39-41) reported that twelve or more British people were settled at Plantain River and hung a British flag.

8. Helms' study, revealing the historically constructed nature of Miskito identity, is detailed later in chapter three.

9. The Black Carib intermarried with Creoles around Trujillo, many were Haitian and West Indian French Blacks who were brought to the coast as slaves to work in the mines and on fruit plantations (Crawford 1984:1-9; and Gonzalez 1984a: 51-65; 1988:53-59). These Carib-Creole unions caused the rapid growth of the Black Carib

population during this initial colonization of the Mosquito Coast (Crawford 1984:1-9, 1986:157-180). Although most scholars agree today (Cosminsky 1976; Cosminsky and Scrimshaw 1976; Cosminsky and Whipple 1984; Crawford 1984; Davidson 1984; 1976; Gonzalez 1984a, 1988; Kerns 1984) that the Garífuna intermarried on the coast with others, scholars presented contradictory information in the past. Taylor (1951; in Crawford 1984:3) said the Garífuna were:

> a society apart whose members rarely inter-marry or have any social dealings with the other non-Carib communities with which they come into contact.

Modern day research by anthropologists disproves these claims, and shows the tendency for the Garífuna to marry outside the ethnic group: the Garífuna intermarried with "ladinos," Creoles, and East Indians in Livingston, Guatemala (Kerns 1984:96-97); Garífuna also intermarried with the Miskito, French and English-speaking Blacks in other parts of Belize (Kerns 1984:97-100); they intermarried with Miskitos in Mosquitia (Coehlo 1955: 30); they intermarried with Creoles, Spaniards, East Indians, Chinese, Mayans and others in Punta Gorda, Belize (Cosminsky and Whipple 1984:115-131). Therefore, it seems that Virginia Kerns (1984: 97-100) is correct in asserting that the Garífuna practice local endogamy, intermarrying with those who live near--"ladinos" in Guatemala, Creoles in Belize, and the Miskito in Mosquitia.

10. The Frenchman who settled Platubila had a cocal to the east that later became the village of Tasbapauni. After the Frenchmen's death, a Garífuna man named Guevarra (who had worked for him) bought the property and settled there.

11. Young singers like Wilinton tell this tale in a more compressed time frame than it actually occurred. Elders claim that the mermaid lived in Kiajkimina and in Liwa Raya for decades before locals summoned shamans to help them free themselves of her. Also, Kuka Denecela's husband Octavio told me that a Tawahka sukia from the Patuca River, not Mikitrik, originally rid Kiajkimina of its liwa mairin in the early 1900s. However, many Río Plátano elders, including Octavio, confirmed the story that it was Mikitrik who swam the mermaid out to sea from Liwa Raya decades later.

12. However, a Creole man named Ricardo Iden who lived in Payabila claimed that the village's name came from an incident where a head of a murdered Pech man was found mounted on a stick near the Ibans Lagoon.

13. Residents of Belén, Cocobila, and Ibans, have their agricultural lands across the Ibans Lagoon and up the Sico-Paulaya and Baltimore Rivers. These villages are in Palacios' geo-political district.

14. The canal was recently extended to Brus Lagoon and is part of a larger indigenous canal system that developed along the Miskito Coast.

15. Puerta Lempira, the biggest town in Moskitia, has a mixed population.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Perspective

Ethnicity and identity studies have dominated anthropological research since the 1960's. While the discipline has produced a diversity of definitions and theories, most studies fit within three general paradigms: primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructionism. These paradigmatic explanations for the phenomenon of ethnicity are sometimes combined, however, primordialism and constructionism are usually treated as being mutually exclusive categories (Janzen 1995). What follows is a discussion of each paradigm in relation to Miskito identity.

Identity Theory

Primordialism,[1] or essentialism, purports that ethnicity stems mostly from ancestral ties (Geertz 1963; Shils 1957; Weber 1961). Social science now dismisses primordialism as a racist paradigm because it plays into the hands of socio-biology. Current anthropology theory goes against biological explanations for behavior, culture, or ethnicity. Kinship studies even focus on kinship as a symbolic, and not as a purely biological construct.

My study shows that Miskito identity is more complex than the primordialists suggest. In a study similar to my own, Linnekin and Poyer (1990:4-6,47) examined ethnicity among indigenous peoples of the Pacific who call themselves "Sea People." Linnekin and Poyer reject ethnic identification based on biological determinants mostly because inter-ethnic marriages are common. Far from a primordialist or essentialist in nature, the Pacific peoples define their identity behaviorally, by a code

of conduct. Thus, the "Sea People's" and the Miskito's own views of their identity are pitted squarely against the primordialists' ancestral explanation for ethnicity.

Instrumentalism, also known as "resource theory," was developed in the late 1960's and 1970's (Barth 1969; Cohen, A. 1974; Cohen, R. 1978; Despres 1969, 1975, 1982; Glazer and Moynihan 1975; Holloman 1975; Keyes 1976; Leach 1954; Nayar 1966). Instrumentalists contend that individuals use ethnicity to advance their own groups' political and economic interests. Many explore the phenomenon of "ethnic switching" for economic gains (A. Cohen 1974; R. Cohen 1978; Barth 1969; Despres 1969; Haaland 1969; Glazer and Moynihan 1975; Moerman 1965; Nayar 1966). Haaland's (1969) work among Sudanese ethnic groups demonstrates how "ethnic switching," or the "relabeling of individuals' ethnic affiliation," results from changes in economic activity among local ethnic groups. Such ethnic conversion was witnessed in colonial India when "the British preference for Sikh army recruits led to many quick conversions from Hinduism to Sihkism" (Nayar 1966:65).

Despres' (1975, 1982) research in Guyana provides a useful starting point for understanding Miskito resource maximization in Honduras. In Despres' (1975, 1982) work in Guyana, he describes ethnicity as an "ascriptive mask of confrontation" and analyzes the contexts in which particular masks were worn. He postulates that in plural societies, like we see in Moskitia, individuals use their ethnicity situationally in an effort to maximize access to resources.[2]

Williams (1989:426) criticizes instrumentalists, especially those who use "resource theory" (Cohen 1974; Cohen 1978; Keyes 1976), for not considering power, status, and the material motivations within the context of the modern state. She believes instrumentalists fall short when it comes to explaining the presence of emergent identities around the world—surely, not only economics has caused ethnic violence within nation states in the Middle East, the Balkans, and Central Africa during the 1990s (Janzen 2000). In spite of these shortcomings, "resource theory" has provided a number of useful insights into understanding ethnicity, especially the phenomenon of "ethnic switching" for economic gains.

"Ethnic switching" first caused anthropologists to re-think their definition of ethnicity and identity. Williams' (1989) studies the ascriptive, strategic, and situational nature of ethnic categories in Guyanese society. She defines ethnicity as the manipulated use of cultural markers to define oneself in relations to others. This new way of seeing ethnicity opened the door to more post-modern approaches.

The constructivists' perspective, which developed in the 1980's, is a more postmodern approach that incorporates much of instrumentalism and stresses the more strategic and situational nature of ethnicity. Constructivists contend that ethnicity constructs itself in context, varies through time and space, and is often "invented" (Anderson 1983; Anzaldua 1999; Collier 1995; Comaroff 1987; Hanson 1989, 1999; Hobsbawn 1990; Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983; Jackson 1991, 1995; Maybury-Lewis 1982; Nash 1989; Rosaldo 1989; Warren 1992; Williams 1989; Watanabe 1990; Young 1993). Far from seeing ethnicity as a bounded and discrete

entity, constructivists view ethnicity as inherently relational, and always in the process of being "invented" and "reinvented" during normal, everyday life (Hanson 1999). Constructivists differ from the primordialists because it is not the primal nature of ethnicity that they stress, but a constructed and invented one (Janzen 2000). Constructivists paved the way for current anthropology's more systemic and processual view of ethnicity. There are two types of constructivists, historical and post-modern constructivists.

Historical Constructivism

Historians and others attempting to deal with the ethnic nationalisms and conflicts that tear away at states around the world explore the historically constructed nature of identity. "Ethnicity and nationalism" scholars, such as Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983), and Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) all viewed ethnic identities as being constructed in the modern era of the state. The central idea arising from their contemporaneous work was that in order for nations and nationalisms to develop, a territorial state should have a shared national culture and common mythic past, or an "imagined community." Their research mainly focuses on the "history of nationalism" and how ethnicity and nationalism are conflated when culturally distinct groups interact with the nation-state (Wright 1995:243).[3]

The approach is beautifully shown in the Latin American setting in La Raza Cósmica by José Vasconcelos (1961). He discusses the nation, nationalism, and national identity in Mexico, and concludes the strong Mexican identity is based in the

belief in a common ancestry. Citizens are defined as "mestizos," descendants from Indians and Europeans, and they trace their roots back to the first union between Hernando Cortez and Malintzin, or La Malinche (Cortez' Indian lover and translator) as the progenitor of their mestizo race (Stutzman 1981).

In the present case of the Miskito, Helms (1977) examines the historically constructed nature of Miskito identity and how their "imagined community has changed over the last four-hundred years. In the 17th century, the European buccaneers, pirates, and settlers mainly called the Miskito people "Muskette Indians" or "Cape Indians" in their documents and ethnographic writings. She shows that the socio-racial category to which the Miskito were assigned in the colonial period varied depending on whether the English or Spanish were classifying them. The Spaniards more commonly referred to them as "Sambos" (literally, a mixture of Indian and Black) and British officials called them "Mosquitos and Zambos." While the British referred to the colonial Miskito as two groups ("Mosquitos and Zambos"), emphasizing their pure "Indian" as well as their mixed ancestry, the Spanish referred to them all as "Sambos," stressing their more "Negro" past. By the mid 19th century, the Honduran state referred to the Miskito as "Miskito Indians" in all legal documents. Thus, the Miskito switched their identity from Indians to Blacks, and then back to Indians again between the 16th and 19th century.

The Miskito peoples continued to be identified as Honduran and Nicaraguan Indians by their nation-states in their cultural patterns and identity throughout the 20th century, eventually becoming recognized as "indigenous" by the Honduran and

Nicaraguan states in recent decades.[4] Therefore, because of the changing constellations of populations on the coast since the colonial period, the Miskito have transformed their collective identities from being Indians in the mid 1600s to being an Africanized or Zambo population from the 1700s to the 1800s; to being Indians from the late 1800s (Helms 1977:162-165), to being indigenous today. This interesting shifting of identity is one of many cases of situational and inverted uses of Miskito identity that have transpired in Miskito interethnic relations.

Anthropologists criticize the historical constructivists' focus on ethnicity and nationalism because they only analyze identity within the context of the state. Anthropologists argue that the historical constructivists overlook the full spectrum of identities that individuals construct in particular social contexts. After all, Barth (1969) reminds us that the concept of nationhood is an "empty vessel" filled with the individual's other larger and smaller identities. These identities relate to gender, class, race, ethnic group, nationality, and the important linkages between one's locally, nationally, and internationally articulated identities.

Postmodern Constructivists

Postmodern constructivist anthropologists claim that identities are both historically and situationally constructed, "invented" differently through time and from one social encounter to the next. This "decentered" and context-dependent view accounts for the flexibility of ethnic boundaries and views the relational, contextual, and situational use of identity. Levi (1992:7) contends:

> These studies of ethnic identity (and its symbolic presentations) have stressed the relational, generative, and flexible aspects entailed in the categorization of persons. Depending on the social situation, for example, people may stress their citizenship in a state, national identity, indigenous, religious, or gender identities. Identity categories, therefore, are multiple, relational, polysemic and shifting according to spatial temporal and cultural contexts.

Nagel (1986:95) says:

> The model has its primary tenets (1) that ethnicity is largely an ascribed status that is situationally activated and (2) that ethnic boundaries are flexible, spatially and temporally fluid, and permeable--permitting the movement of personnel across them.

Hale (1994) considers the historical and situationally constructed nature of identity among the Nicaraguan Miskitu Indians, showing how ethnicity overlaps with many other social identities. He focuses on the relationships between ethnicity, class, and nationalism in revolutionary Nicaragua by detailing the process of mobilization by the Miskitu Indians. Hale describes how the Miskitu ethnic group were complacent for nearly fifty years under the former Somoza regime. They were included as members in Somoza's democratic, "multi-cultural" party, and they approved of Somoza's international economic policies which allowed for North American companies to operate on the Atlantic Coast.

Things changed dramatically in 1979, however, when the Miskitu joined forces with the Sandinistas (FSLN) in a class-based alliance to fight against the

country's elites in Somoza's central government. The Sandinista-Miskitu class-based alliance was short-lived, ending after the Sandinistas proclaimed their national identity to be a Spanish-speaking mestizo one and to reject North American hegemony. This identity--inclusive only to mestizos--politically alienated the Miskitu, who spoke an indigenous language, did not define themselves as mestizos, and maintained strong economic and cultural bonds with North Americans on the Atlantic Coast. Therefore, in reaction to Sandinista mestizo nationalism, the Miskitu organized and created their own political party (MISURASATA) exclusively for those with an indigenous identity. [5]

In contrast to Hale's study that presents a case in revolutionary Nicaragua where ethnic identity trumped class, Field's study in the same country shows the opposite possibility, a case where class trumped ethnic identity. Field's (1995:787) research concerns a culturally heterogenous group of artisans that created a union based on an economic class. He shows that ethnic boundaries broke down and "class identity became salient" (1995:786). Therefore, he argues that identities are flexible and fluid and that class and ethnicity relationships and linkages are defined at many different levels.

Bourgois' (1988) research among Guaymi Indian workers on Costa Rican banana plantations also investigates the inter-related nature of class and ethnic identities. He (1988:328-348) states that for the Guaymi, class and ethnicity are not only economic but social processes that define one another: "class conflates with ideology to create experience of oppression that is more than the sum of economic

and ethnic distinctions." Bourgois calls the conflation of ethnicity and class discrimination "conjugated oppression" and highlights the consciousness of the oppressed group.

Wright's (1995:243-260) study among the Garífuna in Belize also shows the inter-relatedness and fluidity of identities. She focuses on the identities of nationalism, ethnicity, and gender and contends that nationalism has become important in Garífuna ethnicity. Wright reveals this by examining the "Miss Garífuna" beauty contest. "Miss Garífuna" symbolizes the exemplary daughter in their culture, one who knows the history and traditional Garífuna culture and language, but is also versed in English and the customs of national society. Miss Garífuna, who is usually a school teacher, serves as a cultural broker between national and local spheres. Wright says (1995:256-258): "Education becomes a pan-national basis for the legitimation of an ethnic group within the post-colonial nation-state of Belize." She discusses the engendered form of ethnicity in the female symbol Miss Garífuna, concluding that Miss Garífuna represents the metonymy of identity because the nation, ethnic group, and gender are all symbolized by her.

This present study draws most heavily from the post-modernists' "decentered" view of culture and identity to show the malleable nature of Miskito gender, ethnic, and national identities. My research documents the individual's various uses of identity within different social contexts; and focuses on the process through which identity is constructed and reconstructed in the borderlands and margins of society where distinct Others meet---in the female-headed households of a remote indigenous

region. Thus, my work fits squarely within postmodern constructivists' and feminist theories of identity in Latin America (Anzaldua 1999; Behar 1993; Collier 1995; Jackson 1995; Kuznesof 1995; Rosaldo 1989; Wright 1995).

Collier (1995) discusses the "re-bordering" of identities that resulted from the pan-indigenous Zapatista movement in highland Chiapas. Anzaldua (1999) and Rosaldo (1989) examine "border crossings" and the continuous construction and deconstruction of individuals' ethnic and gender identities at the boundaries of society where distinct cultures meet--they call these liminal spaces society's territorial, psychological, and sexual borderlands. These are the creative spaces where culture and identities are fabricated.

Hybridity vs. Situational Identity

Anthropology has compartmentalized literature concerning Blacks and Indians in Latin America, mainly because studies on Blacks have focused on race, racism, and slavery related issues while studies on Indians focus on indigenous identity in the context of the mestizo state (Wade 1997). Just recently, however, Latin Americanist anthropologists have begun to consider the intertwinings of Black and Indian identities: Bonner (1999), England (1996), Davies (1999), Lewis (2000, 2001), Moreno (1999), Rahier (1999), Spulveda dos Santos (1999), Wade (1993, 1995, 1997, 1999), Whitten (1986), and Whitten and Corr (1999) examine representations of Blackness in Latin America, including images produced by the indigenous and Ladino (mestizo) population groups.[6] Wade (1997) states that the

former conceptual divide between Blacks and Indians in the literature has presented difficulties for scholars that study mixed groups, such as the Miskito and Garífuna. There exist at least two possible analytical approaches to understand Miskito identity that avoid focusing on them as either Blacks or Indians. Both "hybridity" and "situational identity" can potentially conceptualize the multi-faceted production of Miskito ethnic identity.

Latin Americanist constructivist theorists probably would analyze Miskito ethnic identity by the more current and popular analytical approach of hybridity, where individuals have the ability to translate across cultures and cultural differences (Anzaldua 1999; Bhaba 1990; Hicks 1991; in England 1996). My work, however, uses the concept of situational identity to describe ethnic identity among the Miskito. Exploring hybridity, and why the Miskito are not hybrid subjects, is useful to understand the complexities of Miskito identity. Then, I explain why the analytical approach of situational identity and the socio-linguistic research methodology I employ are better suited to the study of Miskito identity in the Plátano biosphere.

Anzaldua's (1999:9) "New Mestiza Consciousness" (Vasconcelos 1961) first considered the consciousness of hybridity--being able to accept self fragmentation and one's multiple, and often ambiguous, roots, languages, and frames of reference to create a new identity. Her (1999:25) "chicana manifesto" comes from the painful and disturbing place of the border "where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds." Anzaldua (1999:100) characterizes the New Mestiza Consciousness by the concept of "nepantilism," a state of being between culture, languages, and homelands.

Here, chicanos are politically and economically at a disadvantage--they experience prejudice and racism from the United States and from Mexico because they are not pure Mexicans or pure Gringos, but a mix of the two. Anzaldua (1999:100) sees a cultural collision:

> Like others having or living in more than one culture we get multiple, often opposing messages... incompatible frames of reference. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference cause un choque, a cultural collision. Ultimately, she is interested in how identities are translated across borders, especially in the borderlands where distinct cultures meet.

Bonner (1999) sees hybridity as resulting when cultures mix, but the process of syncretization does not take place. Instead, the elements of the original cultures are detectable. This definition of hybridity does fit Miskito culture to some degree. However, the Miskito, who adapt well to outside cultures, more often tend to Miskitoize cultural elements they borrow from Others. In Sarah England's (1996) study of Garífuna hybridity, she discusses other definitions of hybridity put forth by Emily Hicks (1991) and Homi Bhaba (1990). England (1996:13) says:

> Emily Hicks defines hybridity as occurring in those borderzone areas where people cross geographical or conceptual borders that enable them to see multiple referential codes at once. Homi Bhaba (1990) defines hybridity as that space that occurs in the translation, not through the mixing of two original cultures (as cultures are never fixed therefore there is never an original or authentic moment) but rather through putting together "the traces of certain other meaning or discourses" to create a third space that "displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom" (Bhaba:211).

She goes on to criticize these definitions of hybridity because they do not include any power issues. England believes hybridity has everything to do with power, including who is called "hybrid" and by whom. She points out that the term "hybridity" and "hybrid" are inherently pejorative terms, commonly used to mean "mixed" by those who perceive themselves to be from "pure" races and cultures.

At first glance, the Miskito may look like quintessential hybrid subjects. The Miskito are a bi-lingual and racially mixed population that participates in the global economy in a number of ways. First of all, the Miskito people's RPBR homeland (established in 1980) is a UN sanctioned, environmentally protected area. Secondly, men have worked as deep-water divers and canoemen since 1975 in the lobster industry. Most of the lobsters they kill are sold to purchase foreign goods and merchandise. Thirdly, their indigenous federations also interact with the national Honduran government and international NGO's.

Miskito children dress in Nike high tops, Osh-Kosh over-alls, and designer Tee-shirts. They have posters of celebrities in their houses. Miskito men have water-proof Casio watches, Tommy Helfiger shirts, and Dockers pants and listened to Bob Marley, Willie Nelson, and ranchero music on their boom-boxes. Although many of the brand name clothes they wear are second hand (called "rintin") or Third-World factory imitations, they clearly display Miskito involvement with the global economy.

While Miskito individuals have many external similarities with hybrid subjects, Anzaldua's (1999) and England's (1996) conceptualization of hybridity is difficult to apply to the Miskito peoples of the Plátano Biosphere. In Moskitia,

Miskito individuals do not ideologically define their identity as a "mixed" group vis a vis a more "pure" Other. Indeed, there practically exists no concept of a "pure" culture group. Most of the populations are post-contact groups (the Miskito, Garífuna, Ladino, Creole, and Isleños) that resulted from the intermarriage and cultural mixing of European, African, and Amerindian populations during the colonial era. Even the more "pure" indigenous groups, such as the Tawahka and Pech, have intermarried with the Miskito and Ladino populations locally. Only during Miskito interactions with the Ladinos does a "mixed"--"pure" identity dichotomy come into play. In these situations, Ladinos are thought of as being "real" or "pure" Honduran citizens as opposed to the Miskito, a "hybrid" and marginal ethnic group. Hybridity, then, only accounts for Miskito identity in more national and international contexts where they experience a power disadvantage. Hybridity, therefore, cannot account for Miskito identity as it is played out within their pluri-ethnic homeland.

Even more problems arise when trying to apply the concept of hybridity to Miskito identity at the local level. This section discusses hybridity, putting forth the argument that Plátano Biosphere Miskito do not fit the description of post-modern, hybrid subjects for the following reasons: 1) they have little mobility and migration out of Moskitia; 2) they do not have a consciousness of the oppressed; and 3) they essentially link their identity to land and language (Helms 1971; Offen 1999).

Miskito individuals have many similarities with the post-modern, hybrid subject, however, they do not clearly fit into this category. Anzaldua (1999) and

Behar (1993) claim that hybridity has to do not only with living between two conceptual worlds, but also with mobility and migration. Behar (1993:15) observed:

> The concept of borderlands, so poetically explored by Gloria Anzaldua, is rooted in the slippery social landscape created by transnational capitalism and migration, in which rural Mexicans rub shoulders with yuppies in the various border zones that now cut through the entire terrain of Mexico and the United States.

Miskito men who work as lobster divers on boats are indeed migrant wage laborers, but they work together as teams of relatives and friends on lobster boats, isolated from Others while off-shore. The Miskito do not generally have groups who migrate to the United States, Tegucigalpa, or cities on the north coast to work and earn money, as is common among the nearby Garífuna peoples.[7] Most Miskito-speakers remain in their historic indigenous homeland. Thus, there exists no system of remittance pay where money is earned away from the communities and then sent home. The Miskito have not developed these geographies of economic support.[8]

The Miskito also differ from groups characterized by hybridity because they are not dominated by an outside hegemonic power on a daily basis. The RPBR Miskito live isolated along the north coast in the most remote eastern region of Honduras where there are no national radio stations,[9] roads, or electrical line that reached the north coast of Moskitia. Only recently are newspapers sometimes available in Cocobila, but circulation is poor, only reaching a small portion of the population. Therefore, the Miskito do not display a consciousness of the oppressed

(Anzaldua 1999) because the power of the Honduran state does not easily reach Moskitia. In fact, within their historic territory, the Miskito people are known for oppressing Others. The Miskito aggressively absorb individuals and lands from other indigenous and ethnic groups by marrying them and passing on Miskito language and identity to the children. Presently, Tawahka, Pech, and Central American English dialects are all experiencing language loss due to assimilation to Miskito. Unlike the oppressed consciousness of the hybrid subject, Miskito individuals are the dominant group in RPBR and they are thought of as being exploitative of, and, at times, menacing to the Garífuna, Pech, Tawahka, and English-speakers.

The single most important reason the Honduran Miskito do not fit into the category of hybrid subjects is because of the essentialized way the Miskito see their own identity. Miskito individuals always see their identity as essentially tied to the lands and water-ways of Moskitia (Offen 1999) and speaking their own Miskito language (Helms 1971). Individuals may be of mixed ancestries, who live in a pluri-ethnic region and use their identities situationally (as Black, Indian, Indigenous, RPBR residents, and as Hondurans), but they always define themselves as being part of the Miskito "raza" (race) or ethnic group of Moskitia who speak Miskito. My conclusion is that although the Miskito concept of self is fragmented,--they think of themselves as being culturally and linguistically mixed--they are not clearly postmodern hybrid subjects. Because of this, my research examines the malleable nature of Miskito identity in the RPBR by the concept of situational identity--Miskito

individuals manipulate cultural markers during social interactions with indigenous and ethnic Others.

Frederick Barth (1969) and Edmund Leach (1954) first described the situational and contextual nature of identity. They examined how people changed their ethnic identity by "crossing" group boundaries in Pakistan and Highland Burma. Some Latin Americanist anthropologists (Adams 1970; Colby and Van den Berghe 1969; Stutzman 1981) also showed that individuals could 'pass' from "Indios" (Indians) to "Ladinos" (mestizos) over the course of one generation. These early anthropologists realized the individual's ability to permanently switch from one ethnic identity to another through time.[10] Today, anthropologists emphasize the flexible and fluid nature of identity, and the ability to shift back and forth between various identity constructions depending on the situation.

The analytical approach of situational identity is based in the main tenets of social constructivism, that sees the indiviudal's identity being constructed during social interactions with Others. Therefore, identity is only believed to exist within the context of social interaction (Mead 1964). The self has many identities depending on with whom they are interacting and the setting of the interaction. Thus, there is an inherent situational aspect to self identity, where the individual's various constructions of "self" make up his or her total social identity; and the self is inherently in transition (de Castro 1992; Taussig 1993; Taylor M. 1987).

Jean Jackson's (1983) innovative work in the Vaupés region of the central northwest Amazon is particularly relevant to understanding situational constructions

of Miskito identity. She (1983:105, 227-42) emphasized that Tukanoan self-identity in the Vaupés region was characterized by "nondistinctiveness," "transience," and "relationality" due to the heightened interactions and intermarriages between the sixteen different linguistic groups in the region. Because of the frequent exchange encounters and inter-marriages with other ethnic groups, individuals in the Vaupés have a broad range of cultural knowledge and have learned to manipulate various markers of identification. Jackson (1983:4-5) says of the situational nature of Tukanoan identity:

> Basically, the Tukanoan notions of self and other are more relational, contextual and evanescent than those of many Western societies, in that the more individualistic Western notions place greater stress on the permanence of differentiation between self and other...Tukanoan society...transforms opposition into continua and it allows individuals to slide back and forth between different positions on these continua according to the context at hand. With the self and other as a process, an identity to be maintained rather than something absolute and eternal, self and other become even more flexible concepts and are often literally and figuratively linked together in conceptualization and action.

Therefore, Tukanoan identity, like Miskito identity in the reserve, is in no way fixed or static, but characterized by fluidity and alterity.[11] Jackson also traces her work to social constructivism (Mead 1964).

George Herbert Mead (1964) believed that the relevance of the self passing through Otherness has to do with social identity. The individual's identities are both objective and subjective, including how others objectify and see him, and how he sees himself. Mead's concept of the social self seems quite relevant to the concept of

situational identity in my research. He (1964) believes that the social construction of self is reflexive: the self internalizes the attributes that other people assign him/her in the society. [12]

> "All interaction is based on both objectifying the self and taking the role of the other into consideration. In other words, for social interaction to occur, the self is objectified, constructed into a concrete object of meaning. As an object of meaning, the self can acquire two different dimensions: objective and subjective: the first is that which others make, while the second is what the individual him or herself makes. Both processes of objectification generate a conception of the self within a socio-cultural system of meaning at different levels of reality." (Garcia 1996:23-24).

Mead calls this internal representation the "generalized other" where the self sees himself as the object from the Other's eyes; the self is both subject and object, or signifier and signified to itself. This subjective aspect has to do with cognition and how the self categorizes and classifies himself and Others based on system of contrasts. What is true of the individual in society is also true of the group. Groups classify themselves and each Other based on a subjective system of classification, involving contrasting traits, such as language, ancestry, and customs.

This study collects ethnic terms of reference to examine how Miskito individuals break up their social world and classify Others. Ethnic "labels" or ethnic "terms of reference" have long been of interest to scholars of ethnicity and identity theory. Many researchers have focused on the ethnic labels used by society's members (Barth 1969; Bonner 1999, 2001; Harris 1963, 1970; Khan 1993; Sanjek 1971, 1977; Southall 1976; Sheriff 1999, 2000; Tonkin, McDonald, and Chapman

1989; Wolf 1982). Barth (1969) believed ethnic terms reveal the history of inter-ethnic relations, cultural differences, and ethnicity in a region; and that ethnicity was a subjective process of group identification in which people use ethnic labels to define themselves and their interactions with Others. This is similar to many other classic studies by Furnivall (1939), Gluckman (1956), Hoetnik (1967), Leach (1954), and M.G. Smith (1969, 1965).

Studying ethnic labels allows researchers to concentrate on the subjective rather than objective aspects of identity--the focus is not on the culture group, but on the identity system of the actors.[13] Tonkin, McDonald, and Chapman (1989:2)[14] claim that ethnicity takes us into political and social problems, into "issues of classification and cognition--into structure, symbol, myth, opposition, perception and the rest." Issues of classification and cognition, they believe, are at the heart of ethnic drama in the world today: acts of naming and the classificatory, cognitive, and symbolic niceties surrounding these, are immediately implicated in the most trenchant material and political realities. Thus, Tonkin, McDonald, and Chapman emphasize the importance of ethnic labels to the study of identity.

Ethnic labels show how Miskito construct situational identities during their social interactions in the reserve. Because Miskito are mixed group in a mixed region, they have social space to construct many situational identities, revealed in the variety of terms they are called. Their identities are in contrast with other mixed groups, who all classify each other according to different criteria. Therefore, Mead's perspective of the social self should prove vital in lowland Central America where

contact is easy with other worlds through the Caribbean Sea and to each other along the coast. Here in this cosmopolitan indigenous region, cultural pluralism is pervasive and the Miskito self regularly passes through ethnic and indigenous Otherness during social interactions. Thus, situational identity is the filter I use to view the Kuka's, and the broader Miskito ethnic group's, identity within the bounded territory of the Plátano Biosphere.

Gender and Discourses of Power

Early feminists, the so-called "anthropology of women" generation, first looked at women's status in society and the asymmetries between women and men. These women who studied women, constructed theories about women's status cross-culturally. Women were subordinate to men based on the symbolic public versus private (Rosaldo 1974) and nature vs. culture dichotomies (Ortner 1974; see also Chodorow 1974; Sanday 1974). Ortner (1974) suggested that men, as opposed to women who inhabited domestic spaces, had more access to status and prestige because of their more public use of space. The earlier Feminists, however, were critiqued for depicting women as a homogeneous group that experiences oppression.

Feminist anthropologists of the "anthropology of women" era also studied how descent and post-marital residence affected the status of men and women cross-culturally (Friedl 1975; Martin and Voorhies 1975). In horticultural societies, like the Miskito, for example, Martin and Voorhies (1975) showed that women had higher status in societies with matrilocal residence and matrilineal descent than in patrilocal

or patrilineal societies. These early feminist anthropologists also viewed the structure of the domestic group as important in the gender-power complex (Tanner 1974; Yanagisako 1987; Friedl 1975).

Feminist studies in the 1980's attempted to turn away from status and focus on gender. Gal (1991:176) defines gender as "a system of culturally constructed relations of power, produced and reproduced in interaction between and among men and women." Feminist anthropologists of the "gender studies" era moved past the singular narratives of subordination and oppression first theorized by the "anthropology of women" generation. Convinced that there was no universal gender theory, these anthropologists argued that each study of gender and power was culturally and historically specific. Thus, meaning could only be understood within a local context (Yanagisako and Collier 1987; di Leonardo 1991). However, feminist anthropologists did not completely turn their interests away from women's status. Researchers continued using words that referred to "positionality," such as autonomy, dominance, subordination, etc., which implicated women's status vis a vis men. My research builds on feminist theory concerning women's positionality in patriarchical societies. In the following section, I characterize Miskito society by matrifocality and the "female autonomy" and "male authority" contradictory gender-power complex.

Matrifocality: "Female Autonomy" and "Male Authority"

R.T. Smith (1956) first used the term matrifocality to refer to Black Caribbean families that lived in "consanguineal" households and practiced post-

marital matrilocal residence. Consanguineal co-residential kinship is defined by Gonzalez (1969; 1970) as having no regularly present male in the household in the role of husband-father. Gonzalez (*ibid*) characterized the Garífuna as "matrifocal," which she defined as a type of family or household grouping in which the woman is dominant and plays the leading role psychologically. Male heads of households were generally brothers or sons rather then legal husbands. Gonzalez (1970, 1988) also defined matrifocality as mother-centered, where being a mother was a woman's main role in society. Gonzalez called the Garífuna's consanguineal households "matrifocal units" because women were the socio-economic heads of the household and no man existed in the husband-father role. A typical "matrifocal unit" was a senior woman, a single mother herself, living together with her unmarried daughters and children with, at times, some unmarried sons. Tanner also stressed the mother-centered nature of "matrifocal units":

> Matrifocal units can exist in matrilineal or patrilineal societies, within nuclear families, and in bilateral systems. In any society with an emphasis on the mother-child dyad where this unit is culturally valued and where the mother plays an effective role in the economy and decision making of the unit, that unit can be defined as matrifocal (1974:131-132).

Researchers today refer to the concept of matrifocality by a variety of terms, such as "women-centered kinship networks" (Yanagisako 1977; Cole 1991), "matricentric" (Brettel 1986) and "matripotestal" (Willems 1962; in Brogger and Gilmore 1997:13). Scott (1995:287) claims that these terms do not fully emphasize the central role women play as mothers. He defines matrifocality as:

> a complex web of relations constructed around the domestic group in which, even with the presence of a man in the house, the woman's side of the group is favored. This is evidenced in mother-child relations being more solidary than father-child relations, in the choice of residence, in the identification of known relatives, in exchange of goods and services, in visiting patterns and so on. All are stronger on the female side. It may also be expected that cultural and religious manifestations also emphasize the female role.

Scott adds a new element to the definition of matrifocality by calling attention to women's heightened roles in "cultural and religious manifestations."

Cultural and religious manifestations are also a significant aspect of matrifocality and "female autonomy" that I found in my case study of Kuri (see chapter six). Matrifocality often occurs in societies where men are absent from their household for long periods of time (Scott 1995). This has been shown in Mediterranean cultures (Brogger 1992). Brogger and Gilmore (1997) contend:

> matrifocality often appears in association with heavy male emigration, seasonal unemployment, or (male) economic insecurity. It also occurs where there is high incidence of illegitimacy, as in northern Portugal (O'Neill 1987:235). These features are summarized by Cook (1992:156) as "low male salience".

Male absenteeism is intensified for the Miskito peoples. Not only does the lobster industry take men off-shore for long periods of time, but men live much of the year up-river in seasonal agricultural camps, a day or two travel away from the villages. The high rate of divorce and desertion in Kuri also added to the absence of men. The following is a list of matrifocal features that I will look for in Kuri (Brogger and Gilmore 1997; Gonzalez 1970, 1988; Tanner 1974; Scott 1995).

Matrilocality
Male emigration
Male absenteeism
Female-headed households
High incidence of illegitimacy[15]
Mother-child dyad most important tie in society
Mothers garner status and resources from children
Mother as woman's main role
Emphasis on relatives on mother's side
Women's big role in healing and ritual activity
Women reproduce cultural identity and language

Table 3.1 Matrifocal Features in Kuri

Gonzalez claims that if women attain power in the household only when the men are absent, then this reconfirms men's dominant position as a household member. Indeed, Smith (1956, in Scott 1991:779) also believes the contradictory coexistence of matrifocality and patriarchical norms is the defining characteristic of matrifocality. Belmont (1989:87, in Brogger and Gilmore 1997:14) uses the terms "mother-centered" and "father-ruled" to describe the gender and power complex in a low-income, Neapolitan matrifocal family. Brogger and Gilmore (1997:14) believe these

terms accurately describe a situation where "the fathers are peripatetic or evanescent but not acquiescent." These terms may also describe gender and power relations in Miskito society where men are gone but retain their economic hold over their households from afar, thus causing a high level of female power to exist alongside strong patriarchical norms.

Brogger and Gilmore (1997:13) claim in Mediterranean ethnology, the main point of debate concerning matrifocal households "has centered on the question of whether matrifocality actually is responsible for enhanced female political status outside the home." In the article they wrote together ("The Matrifocal Family in Iberia: Spain and Portugal Compared"), Gilmore (1997:16-20) finds that families seasonally migrate to eastern Andalusia to work in the olive groves, and men stay away from the villages for longer periods of time than the women. Here, women who live in matrifocal families are not accorded higher political status in society and their power remains confined to the domestic sphere. However, Brogger (1997:21-25) finds that women in Portugal, whose husbands leave to work in the fishing industry, do access power in society outside of the family and household domain. They conclude that the "honor-and-shame" value system and "machismo" attitudes that exist in Andalusia, hinders women in their efforts to achieve heightened status beyond the home. Miskito society appears to have more in common with Portuguese fishing societies (Brogger 1997; Cole 1991) than with peasant societies in southern Spain. In the Platano Biosphere, like in coastal Portugal, matrifocality seems to bring women power and elevated status beyond the domestic group.[16]

My research in Moskitia revealed that Miskito women had a high level of "female autonomy" in coastal villages that resulted from their matrifocal social organization--especially the combination of matrilocality and male-absenteeism. Gonzalez (1970:231-232) believes the term matrifocality should include the concept of "female autonomy." Some feminist researchers, however, dislike the term because it commonly refers to women's power within, not beyond, their kinship system. Others object to the term "female autonomy" because it usually refers to female status and power only within the male patriarchy or in hegemonic situations. Blackwood (2000:12-13) specifically objected to the term "autonomy" because it emphasized women's relationship with men (husbands) and not womens' other relationships in society. Thus, she claimed the word autonomy incorporates Western notions of gender and power. I have chosen to use the term "female autonomy," however, specifically because of this. The concept can account for the Miskito women's power, strategies, and agency within their patriarchical society. Following Dyson and Moore (1983:45, in Menon 1996:136), I define "female autonomy" as women's capacity:

> to manipulate [their] personal environment. Autonomy indicates the ability...to obtain information and to use it as the basis for making decisions about [their] private concerns and those of [their] intimates. Autonomy, in other words, relates directly to human agency.

However, I extend the term "female autonomy" to include women's power both within and beyond their kinship systems. This study views Miskito women's power or "female autonomy" as vested in the intensified role they play, not only in village

organization, but in broader political issues that concern their entire population group. With the men away lobster-diving, women play increasingly important roles producing and reproducing Miskito language, culture, and identity.

Marxists (Bloch 1983) define power as the ability to access and control resources, including the social relations implied in the commodity. Marxist feminists argue that women do not achieve equal status until they have the same access to economic resources as men. As applied to the analysis of gender-power relations in Kuri, Marxist feminists would tend to over-emphasize material resources available only to men and under-emphasize the social relations that are part of and surround praidey saihka activities (Blackwood 2000:13-14).[17] Therefore, my study can be seen as a feminist revision--"a new way of looking at all categories" (Behar and Gordon 1995:6)--because I highlight the more social aspects of Miskito economic activities and the production and control of natural and cultural resources they involve.

Women as actors in different domains of society now are viewed as negotiators of social meaning and identities (Blackwood 2000:7). Margolis (1989:399) claims "the creation of an identity is itself one of the strongest expressions of power." Blackwood believes the control over social identities in rural communities forms the "nexus of power." She draws on Foucaultian power/knowledge theory to account for and describe women's complex power relations in a matrilineal Sumatran village. Blackwood (2000:14) defines the concept of power as:

> expressed in the construction and reconstitution of social relations and in the ability to construct and maintain social identities. Rather than imagining single nodes of power, such as those vested, for instance, in positions of authority (titled men, chiefs, or elders), I envision power residing in a multiplicity of nodes and interlinkages that together constitute the processes and practices of social life.

Kuri village organization revolves mainly around male-absenteeism and matrilocal residential patterns. Men are absent from villages who work in seasonal agricultural camps and on lobster-diving boats. With the men gone, related women live near each other throughout their lives and create the most important kinship and economic sharing networks in society. Matrilocal post-marital rules create communities of related women where the men have no familial ties of their own. Senior women, called kukas, play the most powerful roles in society, garnering status, prestige, and resources from their children and grandchildren. This study views Miskito women's main power in society as vested in their ability to create and recreate social identities and kinship relations. Kuri women of the matrigroup raise their children together and play powerful roles as producers and transmitters of Miskito culture, language, and identity. Therefore, social organization was female-centered where related women had a high level of "female autonomy."

Women achieve a high status in society and access resources and power through the knowledge of praidey saihka potions. Powerful grandmothers, called kukas,[18] are respected and feared by others in society for possessing this knowledge. The kukas pass down highly guarded secrets of praidey saihka,[19] including incantations and recipes, to their daughters and granddaughters in private domains.

The incantations and recipes and ingredients can vary widely,[20] and matrigroups become associated with certain types of praidey saihka. Therefore, the recipes and incantations used to make praidey saihka which are passed down through the female line, are a central component of Miskito cultural identity and "female autonomy" in coastal villages (Herlihy 1996a).

Incorporating Foucault and Bourdieu's ideas into gender theory creates a conceptual place from where female power can be theorized. Foucault believes that power is accessible to those in society not only through the state's controls, but also from subordinate, marginalized, or sub-altern discourses. Sub-altern characterizes the places in society where the disenfranchised and marginal sectors of the population live. Bourdieu's theory of practice focuses on actor-individuals that influence the production and reproduction of social structures. Power, then, is not only a "public" phenomenon as in Western narratives, but also functions in the crafting of "everyday" social relations. Researchers now stress women as actors in different domains of society and as negotiators of social meaning (Blackwood 2000:7, 187).[21]

Women's main source of power, as presented in this manuscript, lies in their ability to create, negotiate, and maintain social identities. This dissertation envisions power as lying in the multiplicity of "everyday" constructions of social relations and practices. I consider the "everyday" construction of social identities in marginalized places where power is negotiated and contested; specifically, in female-headed households and matrilocal residential groups in a remote, indigenous region of Honduras. The power that women have in Miskito society, then, lies outside of the

domain of the Honduran state which, first and foremost, recognizes males as heads of households and legitimate authorities. Power, then, is not only found in centralized political spaces, but in unexpected places--in this case, it is found in the Miskito women's discourse surrounding supernatural potions in the small community of Kuri.

Although women have powerful positions as members of matrilocal groups, Miskito society is historically situated in a patriarchical society where Miskito men have more access than women to money, jobs, and education. Miskito society is positioned in masculinized discourses of the Honduran state, patriarchical western religions, and transnational economies. These forces have caused sexual segregation, a gendered division of labor, and a male-dominant gender ideology in Miskito society. As discussed in chapter two's culture history section, Moskitia was not incorporated into the Honduran state until 1860. Interactions with the state have been limited until recently, but the state, nonetheless, has introduced many patriarchical norms into Miskito society. The national government bureaucracy, first and foremost, recognizes male heads of households and males as property owners, disregarding the Miskito more matrilineal practices of inheritance and domestic organization. Moskitia became part of the Honduran nation-state in 1898, beginning the practice of recognizing male surnames, male authority figures, and males as land owners and heads of households.

Representatives of the national government, teachers, and indigenous political leaders are also, almost exclusively, men. The political arena in Honduras also largely excludes women. It is mainly men who become leaders in indigenous

political organizations or local representatives in the national government. I observed that most positions of authority have a formal educational pre-requisite and individuals that fill these posts must have a proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing Spanish, which women are less likely to have. Women, unfortunately, are less likely to have such qualifications, yet can still be vital voices in matters concerning their lands and traditions.

The Moravian missionaries also have introduced many patriarchical norms into Miskito society. Moravians brought Christianity to the Nicaraguan Moskitia in the 1850s, and it reached Honduras about fifty years later, arriving in Brus Laguna and then in Cocobila by the early 1930's (Marx 1980:110, 117). The Moravian church has encouraged nuclear families, male heads of household, and surnames passed down through the male line. In the Moravian ethic, God, Jesus, and most other church leaders, like Pastors and Parsons, are also exclusively men (Garcia 1996b; Helms 1971). Indeed, Moravian tradition symbolically dictates segregation of men and boys who sit on one side of the church while women and girls sit on the other (Garcia 1996b:20).[22] In recent years, both the Catholic Church and the Pentecostal Church have made significant in-roads in the reserve. All of the churches carry with them inherently male-dominated structures.

Miskito interaction with colonial and then transnational economies has brought the most significant patriarchical structure into Miskito society. Men's power has been institutionalized over the last two-hundred years through a male-dominant political economy where external employment opportunities have only existed for

men. Miskito men have worked as migrant wage laborers for European and North American companies, participating in extractive economies (Helms 1971). Through these venues, men have been exposed to more westernized languages, cultures, and economies than the women. Men work with Ladinos and Isleños on boats where they speak Spanish, learn some English and travel to distant Caribbean shores. For the last thirty-five years, the lobster diving industry has thrived on the Honduran Coast (Dodds 1998; Herlihy and Herlihy 1991; Nietschmann 1997). Men's power, then, in coastal Kuri is sustained by the male-dominant lobster economy, the most patriarchical structure in Miskito society. Through their jobs as lobster divers, men retain their "male authority" as society's main wage earners. Men's access to migrant wage labor, therefore, mainly establishes their "male authority" along the coast. Because women increasingly desire the cash and store-bought items that only men can provide, this reinforces "male-authority" in the coastal communities of the Plátano Biosphere.

Miskito women have a high level of "female autonomy" within their patriarchical society. They live in matrilocal groups without the daily presence of men and also use strategies to access money and power in a society where men only have access to migrant wage labor. Therefore, an ambiguous gender-power complex exists in coastal villages characterized by both "female autonomy" and "male authority." Miskito women, as a result, participate in distinct and often contradictory discourses of gender ideologies; one, the dominant discourse of "male authority," spoken by men and women in public contexts; the other, the subordinate discourse of

"female autonomy," spoken by related women in private contexts. Miskito women, then, slide back and forth between these discourses of gender ideologies depending on the situation. Through women's linguistic heteroglossia (controlling distinct ways-of-speaking), they construct situational gender identities at the local level.

Agency, Strategies, and Practices

The coastal economy has caused an ambiguous gender-power complex to develop in coastal Miskito society, where women's power existed alongside a strong male dominance. The power that women have living their lives in matrilocal groups is countered by the male-dominant lobster economy. In an attempt to elucidate how the "female autonomy" and "male authority" contradiction is resolved between women and men in their daily lives, I borrow from feminist researchers who examine women's strategies to access money and power within their patriarchical society.

My study views women as agents of social change and highlights the Miskito women's strategies to access power and resources in society (Lamphere et. al. 1997). My research, then, builds on feminist theory concerned with women's agency, types of power, strategies, practice, and resistance in societies with patriarchical ideologies (Yanagisako and Collier 1987).[23] As opposed to seeing indigenous women as submissive victims, then, my study views Miskito women as agents of social change, as actors with strategies to access power and resources in society, both within and beyond their kinship system. This approach developed in the 1980s, after feminist theory incorporated both Foucault's concept that power and agency are inherently

related and Bourdieu's theory of practice. This drew feminist researchers' attentions not only to women as actors who create and negotiate social meaning, but also to the agency of individual women in their everyday lives.

My research examines women's positionality in Honduran Miskito society and the strategies and practices Miskito women use to access money and power in their everyday lives. A male-dominant economy exists on the north coast of Honduras, where men alone have access to steady wage labor. Today Miskito men work off-shore as deep-water lobster divers on boats mainly owned by Honduran Bay Island businessmen. While men are the main wage earners in coastal Miskito society, the women use various strategies to access their wages. One main strategy they use is a type of sika (healing remedy), called praidey saihka (plant-based potions that control another person's behavior and emotions). Generally used as love potions in the past, Miskito women now mainly use praidey saihka to beguile and bewitch the male lobster divers into giving them money. Praidey saihka is a major form of women's economic empowerment, a strategy that women use to access men's winnings, thus, helping their households survive on the cash-oriented coast.

Field research examines how Miskito women in the coastal village of Kuri use the strategy of praidey saihka to access men's earnings from the deep-water lobster diving industry. Because the women utilized these potions to empower themselves vis a vis the men, praidey saihka is part of the women's broader discourse of "magic" that is used to subvert male power (Behar 1987, 1989, 1993; Romanucci-Ross 1993). Thus, my research uses Abu-Lughod's (1985, 1990b), Messick's (1987), and Gal's

(2001) interpretations of discourse as social practice to view parts of society that people find displeasing and want to change.

My fieldwork documents the different types of praidey saihka potions made by Miskito women in the village of Kuri, including the recipes and ingredients they used; the texts of the incantations they recite to endow the potions with supernatural powers; and the reasons Miskito women give for using each type of potion. I hope to demystify the category of the "submissive indigenous woman" by giving voice to sub-altern women, highlighting the strategies they use and the reasons they give for using them (Behar 1993). Revealing the multi-vocality of the matrigroup should dispel a homogeneous view of Miskito culture (Abu-Lughod 1991).

My research analysis reveals the situations and contexts in which various Miskito ethnic and gender identities are constructed. My central research problem combines instrumentalist and constructivist approaches with ethnicity and gender theory in an effort to explore how Miskito individuals use situational identities to gain access to scarce resources in their homeland. The analysis investigates how the control of resources affects the types of identities that Miskito individuals construct within the complex of power and gender.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. Primordialism or essentialism was popular at the time when new nations were arising in Asia and Africa (Janzen 1995). Geertz (1963) and Shils (1957) argued that one's biological needs are met through ethnicity, a visceral response to alienation. Thus, ethnicity fulfills the human need for close ties and strong emotions between

groups of individuals. However, Nash (1989) claims that if it really were a human psychological need, you would find it occurring all over the world, but you do not.

2. Holloman (1975) studying the Kuna in Panama also applied Despres' resource competition model found that Kuna used their identities instrumentally.

3. Hobsbawm (1992) also combines instrumentalist and constructivist approaches, viewing ethnicity as that identity which groups fall back on when the state can no longer ensure the provision of resources to its citizens. Hobsbawm is interested in the situations where identity is organized for political and economic motivations and how class and power play into this. He believes ethnic symbols are used as a tool, not as an essentialized force.

4. Karl Offen (1999) also studied the historically and cultural-ecologically constructed nature of Miskitu identity and found that Moskitia as a place was an intrinsic aspect to their ethnic identity.

5. This overview of Hale's study was first summarized in a book review by the author (Herlihy 1996b).

6. Many of these works (Davies 1999; Moreno 1999; Rahier 1999; Sepúlveda dos Santos 1999; Wade 1999; and Whitten and Corr 1999) are articles in Rahier's (1999) Representations of Blackness and the Performance of Identities.

7. The Garífuna have major communities in California, New Orleans, and New York that send money back to relatives in coastal Honduran villages (England 1996; Gonzalez 1988).

8. Small communities of Miskito-speakers also live elsewhere in Honduras at La Ceiba, Tegucigalpa, and on the Honduran Bay Islands. The Miskito also have one community in Texas (home to Nicaraguan refugees), and there are some Nicaraguan Miskito peoples in Miami, Florida (refugees), and in North Carolina and Pennsylvania (associated with the Moravian Church). These Miskito-speakers, both in Honduras and in the United States, though, do not regularly send money back regularly to their relatives in Moskitia.

9. The radio stations accessible during my field work years were in 1991, a station that broadcast in Miskito and Spanish from nearby Brus Laguna and one broadcast in English from Grand Caymen. These stations were not accessible in 1995 or 1997-98, but there was one station, broadcast in Spanish from Cancun, Mexico that reached the coast in 1997-98.

10. Some focused on the situations and contexts in which behavioral cues or "ethnic markers" are used by "Indians" and "Ladinos" to define in-group and out-group

behaviors (see among others, Nash 1989). Research also focuses on the identity system of the actor and the emic assumptions (behavioral cues, language, etc.) that Indian and Ladino individuals use to classify themselves and "Others."

11. In the early 1990s, anthropologists explored the concept of alterity. Michael Taussig's book Mimesis and Alterity (1993, applies the notion of mimesis and alterity to the process of authentification in Kuna identity and material culture. He (Taussig 1993:129-143) uses the Kuna of Panama as a case study to explore issues of identity, difference, and how groups and traditions remain the same through alterity or Other-becoming. Through a process similar to the "law of contagion" in sympathetic magic, Kuna material culture today that is produced as market items in the global economy, maintains the qualities of the "original" items produced in the past.

Taussig (1993:xiii-xix, 47-51) defines authentification as the process in which the 'copy' is granted the power and meaning of the 'original' (and the simulacra becomes meaningful) in the present, much like the "law of contagion" in sympathetic magic. He begins by defining the mimetic faculty:

> the nature that culture uses to create a second nature, it is the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, and explore difference, where one thing yields into and becomes other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power (Taussig 1993:xiii).

Thus, he defined the mimetic faculty as the compulsion to become the Other. By creating the simulacra of the traditional crafts, the newer bags maintain the original sense of the bag--through mimesis, like the law of contagion in sympathetic magic, the "copy" assume the character and power of the "original." De Castro (1992:249), in a quite different kind of study, considers the Arawete Guaraní cannibal self also to be defined by alterity. According to De Castro (1992:254, 264-265), the Guaraní cannibal's concept of self lies in the process of Other-becoming, actualized when he kills and eats others. Like the Guaraní cannibal's more cosmological self, the Miskito social self is in constant transition. To understand the Arawete concept of the self-in-transition, De Castro (1992:273-305) claims it is necessary to understand that they view their own cannibalistic experience as transforming into the enemy.

12. As Hallowell (in Jackson 1983:2) said: "The individual's self image and his interpretation of his own experience can not be divorced from the concept of the self that is characteristic of his society." Gonzalez (1988:144) seems to echo this belief where she sees signs of the Garífuna personhood placed on the entire group while in interactions with others. Gonzalez (1988:161-66, 172-92) warns us to be conscious that ethnicity is part of the social self, and that we must look at how individuals think of themselves as social beings to understand their concept of self. She (Gonzalez 1988:184-5) observes:

> More and more anthropologists are paying attention to individuals, realizing that to a large extent ethnicity is defined by the way people feel about themselves and their relations with others. Not all people are conscious of ethnicity as a feature of their lives or as part of their definition of self, so it goes without saying that if we are to understand the ways in which ethnicity operates in the world today, we must examine the forces that bring individuals to think of themselves as "Ethnic" beings.

13. In Southall's (1976) discussion of the Nuer and Dinka, he also looked for the divisions in human groups made from the insider's perspective. More recently, Linnekin and Poyer (1990), searched for the symbols, meanings, and indigenous categories which the Pacific people use to distinguish between themselves and Others; and the behaviors that were essential to being "sea people."

14. Tonkin, et. al (1989) considers the inter-relationship between the classification of time and people, arguing that history is crucial in the analysis of ethnicity. They (1989:5) ask, "How did the past create the present?" and "How did the present create the past?"

15. Illegitimate children are called "half-siblings" in my analysis of Miskito household composition (see chapter six).

16. Perhaps this is because the Mediterranean, the Spanish, and ultimately the colonial Spanish "honor-and shame" value system does not fully function on the Honduran Caribbean coast (Jamieson 2000a).

17. The Marxist perspective on gender and power has so far not accounted for a full consideration of the social relations that are part of production, exchange, and consumption among the Miskito (Blackwood 2000). What value would Marxist feminists accord to the Miskito women's production and exchange of traditional cultural and linguistic resources? Plátano Miskito women do not have significant wage-earning jobs, but have access to many more cultural resources than the men. Women not only play important roles in kinship networks and exchanges, but also are the bearers of language, family histories, folklore, traditional healing knowledge, village and agricultural lands, and leadership roles in their communities.

18. The plural of a noun in Miskitu is normally constructed by the singular form followed by the word "nani." For example, "kuka nani" and "sika nani "mean grandmothers and medicines respectfully.

19. Saihka is the construct of the word sika and means the medicine of some person, place, or thing. Jamieson (2000b) discusses the Miskito use of the construct and its implications for Miskito perceptions of alienable and inalienable

20. While the recipes vary tremendously, there are three major categories of praidey saihka that exist: 1) aisi sakaia that mainly involves a money payment to a plant, extracting or cutting the plant, and saying an oration, and the other 2) yabakaia and yumuh that require an additional element of ritualized blowing, and 3) yumuh that is the most potent, desired, and complicated being more ethereal and prayer oriented. People prefer and desire yumuhs because they cannot be diffused with a "contra" or a counter-active potion (Barrett 1992; Garcia 1996; House and Sanchez 1997).

21. Among the earliest anthropologists to consider agency were; Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974). Since then many anthropologists have studied women's strategies and voices in relation to different groupings of men. Lamphere and colleagues (1997:4-5) provide an overview of these studies (see also, Bourque and Warren 1981; di Leonardo 1984; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Sacks 1979; Sanday 1981; Warren and Bourque 1985; Weiner 1976; Zavella 1987).

22. Formerly, women covered their heads with a white doily and wore all white clothes during Moravian services.

23. Strategies and agency as concepts are related to the Marxist term "Practice," which has to do with action, or "every-day" events and human activity involving self-change, especially with regard to structural inequalities in society (Lamphere et al. 1997:4). "Practice" also has to do with the Bourdieuian (Bourdieu 1977) concept of habitus--that pre-existing social and economic practices and individual agency produced certain kinship structures. However, Blackwood (2000:16-17) claimed that individuals' experiences and often ambiguous social identities cause new and different practices to change pre-existing kinship structures.

Chapter Four: Fieldwork and Methodology

Since I am the instrument through which data and analysis is being filtered, you need to know who I am as a person. I am a privileged, educated, white woman, a feminist anthropologist, a mother, and a wife. To explain how these identities and roles may affect this study's data collection and analysis, I need to tell you about three pivotal moments in my life; one, was when I "discovered" anthropology, another, when I met my husband, and the last, when I became a mom.

Subject Positionality

I have come a long way since growing up in New Orleans, where I attended an all-girl private school, lived in a female-oriented family, traveled throughout Spain and learned Spanish, and was a formal debutante and Carnival Queen. In 1983, the year of my debut, I lived at home and attended Tulane where I "discovered" anthropology and took many classes concerning Latin America. Anthropology student by day, debutante by night, I began to see the unique culture of New Orleans through both an insider's and outsider's perspective. As a participant observer, I reveled in the city's gumbo of Black, White, Creole, Hispanic, and other cultures and languages, its flagrant prestige economy, and its many aspects of matrifocal social organization.

Because of the similarities that I perceive between New Orleans and the Miskito Coast, my dissertation concerns not only Miskito women's identities, but also my own. My growing in up in a pluri-ethnic, women-centered society with a prestige economy

caused me to recognize and focus on these aspects of Miskito organization. For example, I quickly became aware of the social hierarchy in Kuri and hooked up with the wealthiest sister Delfina, a teachers' wife and a restaurant and bodega owner, who was the key to the strong social position of the larger matrilocal group.

After graduating from Tulane in 1986, I went to the College of William and Mary's field school in the Caribbean where I studied female-headed households. The following year, I headed to Baton Rouge and entered LSU's MA program in anthropology. I met my husband on a LSU field trip to central Mexico in 1989.[1] Peter, a Yankee from up-state New York, had finished his doctorate at LSU, and was then a professor of geography at Southeastern Louisiana University (on the north shore of Lake Pontchatrain). Peter and I ended up travelling through the high reaches of the Sierra Madres to visit the indigenous Huichole peoples, far off the gringo trail. We continued to see each other in Louisiana and were married within a year and a half.[2] Being married to a cultural geographer (who works with indigenous rainforest peoples) has greatly influenced my field research. Without him, I probably would never have worked in such a remote region. And I would have encountered many more difficulties doing research in Latin America and the Caribbean. Doing field research before I was married, I was often seen as a threat by local women who, perhaps, could not relate to my independence. As a married researcher, women have confided a lot more in me. Especially in Kuri, where I was married and my husband was gone most of the time, my life had many parallels with the women. They usually talked openly with me about their husbands and even began teaching me their secret ways of controlling the men.

While the women could relate to my marital status and my being a female head of household, most of them were mothers. I could not directly understand motherhood when I did my fieldwork and data collection. However, I got pregnant two months after returning from my dissertation fieldwork and wrote my dissertation both while I was pregnant and as a new mom. Therefore, my collection of field data concerning mother-daughter relations was more in the abstract, but the analysis of the data was done in the throes of new motherhood and seemed to blend with real life.

As I prepare to defend this work in Spring 2000, my daughter Simone is almost 20 months old. We plan on taking her to Kuri for the first time this summer. We are truly excited that Simone and Kuka Denecela's family will get to meet and spend time with each other. In reality, since moving to Kansas in 1993, I have spent more time with Kuka Denecela's family in Kuri than with my own family members in New Orleans. And sad but true, my daughter Simone will probably get to know Kuka Denecela more than her own grandmother, Jane, who heads her own matrilocal group in a parallel universe. For me, then, field research is personal therapy. It's all about finding one's place in a culture, language, and kinship group and creating a home away from home.

Feminist or Gendered Ethnography?

Ethnographies written by feminists in the 1980s discussed women's strategies, but not always in relation to men. Some female anthropologists championed political causes by describing feminist utopias with high sisterly solidarity (Bell 1993; Shostak 1981). However, their ethnographies were biased and equated culture with women, the mirror

images of earlier ethnographies written by men that ignored women. Postmodernists (Clifford 1986:104; Marcus and Fischer 1986:58; Rabinow 1986:257) critiqued these feminist studies and deconstructed the female ethnographer's less than objective eye. (Visweswaran 1997).

Haraway (1988) and Price (1993) warned female anthropologists who searched for strong sisterhoods in foreign lands not to overstate their claims or project a "false harmony" on the societies they studied. In Price's (1993) examination of menstruation huts in Maroon society, for example, she realistically portrayed women participants as independent, but not as matriarchs having power meetings once a month. Haraway's (1988) concept of "situated knowledges" deals with this feminist ethnographic dilemma. She states that knowledge is always produced by an individual subject-actor who is located in a particular social and historical context.

Today, feminist anthropologists have created more complex theories for understanding gender, power, and social relations. Researchers continue to highlight women's agency, types of power, strategies, practice, resistance, and multiplicity, in societies with patriarchical ideologies (Blackwood 2000). My research examines Miskito women's strategies and practices to access resources and power in their patriarchical society. Specifically, women are viewed as agents/actors with strategies for accessing power and resources from men who participate in the deep-water lobster diving culture.

My dissertation is similar to a feminist ethnography because I admit to having a partial view of reality (Abu-Lughod 1990a, 1991; Behar 1993; Haraway 1988; Knauft 1996; Visweswaran 1997). I am a woman living in Kuri, a village controlled by women,

who aims to show Miskito women's central role in daily village life and in larger cultural processes. My questions pertain to how women create, shape, and control kinship relations and social identities. Then, I analyze all daily interactions as contestations and negotiations of identity, power, and meaning mainly from the women's perspective. Because I am also a woman, I was privy to the personal stories of the women in a way that I was not with the men. I interacted mostly with women because, most of the time, the men were not there. Therefore, I acknowledge these parameters of my understanding.

My dissertation also is similar to feminist ethnographies in other ways: it gives voice to marginalized women, looks for female contestations to the male patriarchy (highlighting women's strategies in society), uses an experimental writing style, and was a transformative personal experience for the researcher. The local women would ask me as much, or more, about my life as I did about theirs during our interviews (Behar 1993). My work diverges significantly from feminist ethnography, however, because it is not solely "by, for, and about women." I consider both the construction of femininity and masculinity in Moskitia. My study, then, may best be described as a gendered, not a feminist, ethnography. (Knauft 1996:222.)[3]

Recent feminist ethnographers revalue travel accounts written by early anthropologist's wives who accompanied their husband's to the field. Feminist ethnographers claim these travel accounts, written in a non-academic style, are a uniquely feminine way of writing. My work explores this non-academic style in five short stories presented in the following section. Most of these stories were written during my original travels to the region, when I accompanied my husband Peter, a cultural-geographer, to the

field for his post-doctoral research in 1991. Other stories were written when I returned to complete my dissertation fieldwork in 1995 and 1997-98. The stories show how I lived with Kuka Denecela's matrigroup over a seven year period; and how the researcher had a transformative experience of sisterhood that prepared her for motherhood.

The Kuka, My Sisters, and Me

February 1991

To reach Kuri, my husband Peter and I flew in a small Isleña airplane from La Ceiba to Palacios, took a "tuk-tuk" (a motorized dugout canoe) across a Ibans Lagoon, and then walked overland a few kilometers[4] along a land strip between lagoon and sea. The land strip was separated from the coast by a natural sand levee. With the freshwater Ibans Lagoon to the south, and the Caribbean to the north, tropical breezes kept the coastal villages relatively mosquito-free.

We walked past the villages of Cocobila and Belén and then came to New Jerusalem, a village on the dry, sun-baked savanna. There were few trees for shade along the path and we grew tired from the weight of our backpacks. About thirty minutes later, we entered a pristine grove of sea grapes that wrapped around the path to form a tunnel. Once inside the tunnel, we felt a gush of cool, sea air. Descending the sand mound, the white beach stretched east and west for as far as the eye could see. Then we turned and glanced inland. And there it was.... Kuri, a small beach front village less than a kilometer wide, elevated on a sand bluff and bounded by water on three sides. Kuri looked like a

friendly place, sitting amidst tall coconut and other fruit trees. Smoke clouds effused from its cook houses. Compared to the dry savanna behind us, Kuri looked like paradise.

"Meriki nani aula" (Americans are coming). The children playing on the beach ran in front of us to announce our arrival. Looking out to sea, there were a dozen or more decrepit shrimping boats. The boats, now also used for lobstering, looked like winged insects ready to fly ashore and sting the locals.

Once inside Kuri's limits, professor Sixto George greeted us. Sixto, ostensibly named after George VI, was one of the first Miskito people to work as an elementary school teacher in Honduras. Originally from Auka, Nicaragua, Sixto moved here after marrying Delfina Eden and now taught in the nearby school in Utla Almuk (called the Kuri School).[5] Sixto walked us over to meet Kuka Denecela, his wife's mother.

The Kuka was wearing a turban, smoking a pipe, and sporting two dozen or so multi-colored beaded necklaces. She posed for a moment with her arms spread and head bowed down. "Wel...," she false-started in Spanish. "Welcome...to... Kuri" she continued, dropping her arms and taking a deep breath, as if exhausted from speaking Spanish. "See those trees?," Kuka pointed with her lips perched toward the edge of the yard. "They are mine, and this is my patio," she added, gliding her hand slowly to frame the yard. She continued to mark off her territory, pointing with her lips to each house near-by, saying "See that house?" "That's my daughter's....I give my daughters land so they can stay close to me," she explained. Then, she lip-pointed at a different hut, "You can stay there while my daughter Enemecia is up-river."

"Cool," I heard myself say out loud, while processing the information: all of the Kuka's daughters had their homes encircling their mother's patio area. This seemed a text book case of the matrilocal residence pattern, and my home was already tied into a residential compound of related women. And Kuka was the head of the residential group, village elder, and land owner who had just welcome me into the village!

Peter and I lived in Enemecia's house, one of Kuri's typical houses--thatched roof, one room structures with wooden walls and floors. The homes were built on posts and elevated three to five feet from the ground. Most had separate cook houses, built on the ground with a "fogon," or clay hearth. A few of the houses were more highly elevated with tin roofs and a few were painted blue, a local sign of prosperity. Some less substantial huts were structures made of bamboo walls that sat on the ground and distinguished the poorer residents.

We ate all of our meals in Delfina's "comedor" (the Spanish term for a small restaurant). It was actually a windowed one room structure on the front of her other house and we were usually her only customers. Delfina, Kuka Denecela's oldest daughter, was referred to by all family members as "Kikalmuk" (the Miskito kinship term for eldest sister), or just "Kika." She served us typical meals of beans, rice, yuca, coffee, and baked bread. Sometimes a meal included spaghetti, instant soup, fresh fish, or meat--usually pork or beef, and sometimes chicken, iguana, turtle, or deer.

There was no electricity or running water in Kuri. Most of our activities were done by daylight and we used candles and flashlights at night. Delfina boiled river or rain water for us to drink and Peter hauled our bathing water from a well. We bathed in the

house by pouring water over our heads with cups. The wooden floors of the houses had spaces between them, so the water fell through the floor boards. Our tent was set up in the house to protect us from insects causing malaria and dengue and disturbing night crawlers like roaches, rats, or bats. Inside the house were also a few wooden tables, benches, chairs, stools, bookshelves, and a hammock.[6]

Kuka Denecela's sleeping house and cook house were set back in the village, one-hundred yards or so from the beach. Our house was closest to the Kuka's and overlooked an open freshwater well in her patio where sisters washed clothes, bathed, and held court much of the day. During the days that followed, I watched the activities of the women: cleaning the house and patio, cooking, caring for the young, and working in their yuca fields close to the beach. The women and children visited each other's houses continuously throughout the day. I began to see the tightly knit social and economic networks that existed between the related women while they attended to their daily domestic activities. I realized how all of the daughters' households were part of the larger domestic unit of the matrilocal compound. And that, among the coastal Miskito peoples, the village was the women's and children's domain. Then, the most obvious question struck me, "Where were all the men?"

As days turned into weeks, I began to know the sisters well enough to ask them about their husbands. Most of them worked as "buzos" (deep-water lobster divers) on boats fishing in Honduran and other international waters or up-river in family agricultural fields. The rainforest region of Moskitia lay behind the villages connected through a network of lagoons, canals, and rivers. Family agricultural lands with seasonal work

camps called "kiamps" in Miskito, "champas" in Spanish, and "camps" in English, are situated along Río Plátano a day or two up-river by "pipante" (a flat bottom dug-out canoe) and "palanca" (a pole used to push canoes up-river) from the coastal villages. Thus men were absent because of both migrant wage and subsistence labors. Still other men lived temporarily in different regions of Moskitia, with other wives and children.

Kuri is connected to ten other neighboring coastal villages through a network of foot paths, lagoons, and man-made canals, in addition to the open coastal by-way. "Being-on-the-coast" ("Kabura") was being in a social world of visiting friends and families; paths, canals, and beaches linked all Miskito villages between the Río Plátano and Ibans. Kuri lies in the hub of social and economic activity along the north coast of Moskitia. "Being-on-the-coast" was being in a cosmopolitan, cash-oriented economy, connected to the outside world; it was watching the hustle and bustle of people in motion to churches, schools, health centers, graveyards, bodegas, and stores (Figure 4.1). The coastal villages, like Kuri, were the women and children's domain. The women much preferred this ambience compared to the isolated agricultural camps up-river.

"Being-up-river" was a different state of mind than "being-on-the-coast." "Being-up-river" was being in an isolated world and living close to the elements, where insects devoured uncovered body parts. Both sun and rain beat down relentlessly on those traversing the river and working in agricultural fields. Up-river, travel was difficult by foot in marshy terrain or by boat in clogged swamps. Up-river was a tougher environment with no luxuries; this was the men's domain.

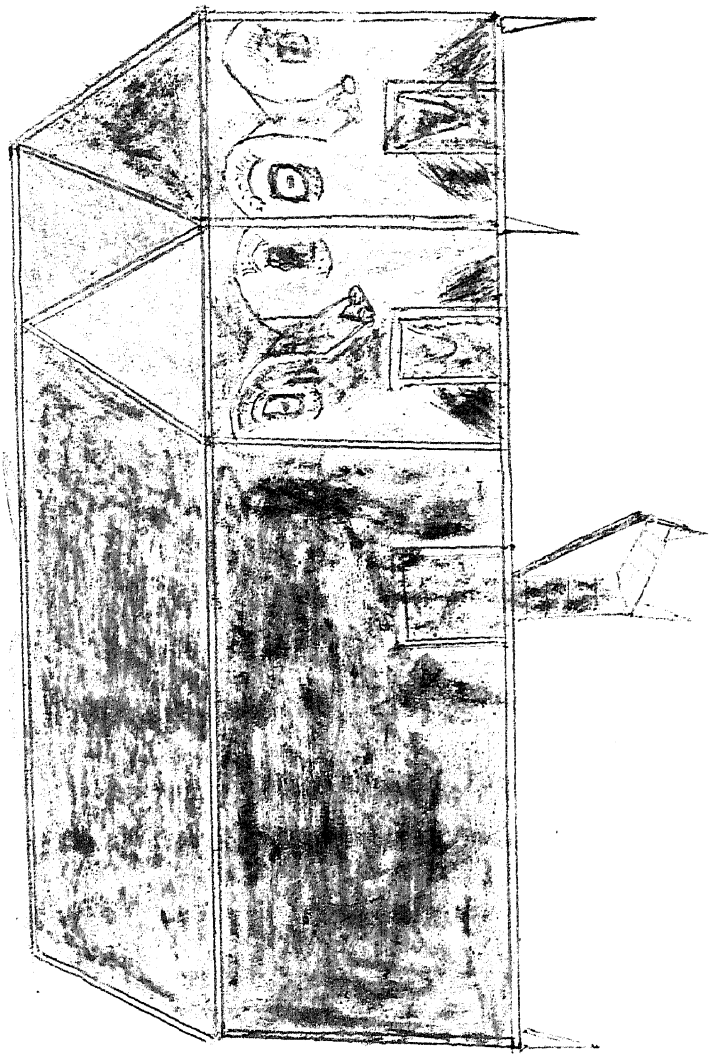

Figure 4.1 Drawing of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church in Kuri (by Marcos Kendrid)

A Trip up the Plátano River

March 1991

"The boat is at the landing," Kuka Denecela instructed us. She talked about the landing as if it were a launching pad that shoots you off to another world, one that the Miskito called up-river or "klaura." Kuka walked us through the neighborhood of Kusuapaihka, and we saw several of the boats at the "landin" (the canal's edge that villagers used as a natural dock). Some were small flat pipantes made for poling up and paddling down the rivers; others were larger barrel shaped "cayucos" (round bottom dug-out canoes built for ocean travel) with large outboard motors. The passengers waited patiently for their boatmen, wearing plastic bags, hats, and towels fashioned as turbans to protect themselves from the strong mid-morning sun.

"Klaura kaisa?" (Are you going up?), Kuka Denecela asked her friend in one of the canoes. "Äouu" (Yes), the woman said, starting with her mouth in a smile to pronounce the back vowel "Ahh," and then slowly moving her lips into a kiss to pronounce the front, "ouuuu." She elongated the vowels to make her answer more emphatic. Then Kuka pointed to her grandson in another canoe and said, "Pain bas" (Behave yourself). The boy did not answer. "Walma (Are you listening?), Kuka asked him in a threatening tone.

Peter and I climbed into our cayuco. Allen Rivens was our boatman and guide who traveled with us. Allen worked in the late 1970's as the guide for the original team of conservationists, scientists, and government people that created the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve. Now he worked as a park ranger. Unusually tall for a Miskito man,

Allen stood six-foot two inches tall. He was the grandson of Alton Bruner, a North American man who had lived in the neighborhood of Jaloba in the nearby Garífuna village, Plaplaya, and worked with the United Fruit Company.

Allen used his machete to slice branches in half and pushed them between the sides of the cayuco to make seats for us. Peter and I brought rubber boots, compasses, maps, notebooks, water bottles, sun-block, back-packs, and plastic ponchos; in the other canoes, the Miskito people had machetes, shot-guns, paddles, and poles. And everyone had a box or two of store-bought provisions that were unavailable up-river. Even though it was dry season, everything was enclosed in plastic bags and covered to keep things dry in case of an afternoon shower.

Friends and relatives shook hands and kissed each other good-bye along the dock before climbing into the canoe. They grabbed hands softly by the ends of the fingers, pressed their faces together, and smelled each other, making a sniffing sound. They spoke quietly, saying "Aisabe" (Good-bye) and "Kai ki was" (See you later), looking down respectfully to avoid eye contact. The cayuco next to ours left the dock. We began to drift backwards too. To reach the Plátano River, Allen drove us through a lagoon and then down a small and shallow man-made canal in a freshwater swamp. The cayuco barely fit the narrow passageway of the canal. "Bam!!" The bow of our canoe hit another canoe head-on. Allen pushed us backwards and over to the side. When the other canoe passed by, he rudely uncovered their load of fish within arms distance, "You caught too many" He said to the youngster. "Why not give me two" he continued, already helping himself. Allen collected royalties while enforcing resource conservation as a park ranger.

We continued through the canal connecting to the Río Plátano some distance up-river from the mouth. Travelling up-river, we passed a couple of bends of cattle-land and then began our ascent through Miskito agricultural and hunting lands. Using one of the few out-boards then found along the north coast, we passed canoes carrying as many as ten people, most with a few children under five years of age. Some cayucos and pipantes were packed with roosters, dogs, and cats in bags, heading up-river; other dug-outs, however, were filled with produce and heading back down to the coast.

Around the first bend, a woman and her daughters were stopped at a beach. Allen pulled over alongside of them and then kissed each of the children. It was his former wife, Enemecia, and their three children returning from Liwa Raya. Enemecia had recently separated from Allen and retreated with her children to her agricultural lands in Liwa Raya. Here she lived working the land with her father, "Dama"(Grandfather or respected male elder) Octavio.

"I'm going to Kuri to visit my mother," Enemecia told Allen. He looked down in disappointment and then tried to persuade her otherwise. "We need a woman to cook for us in Liwa-Raya." (I did not qualify as a woman because I did not cook). Surprisingly, Enemecia agreed to come along with us. Perhaps she had been thinking of the money the gringos surely would pay her for cooking for them; or maybe she was more interested in spending time with Allen, the father of her three youngest children, for whom she still held a serious torch. Enemecia and the children climbed into our motorized canoe. We towed their smaller pipante alongside our large cayuco, and settled in for a three hour trip, better than the ten or twelve it normally takes Enemecia to pole up-river without a motor.

The Río Plátano twists and turns like a snake; its water glistened as it broke on the boat's bow. The river cuts through the landscape, revealing the "champas" on high bluffs overlooking the river's edge. Champas were less-substantial shelters built on the high levee, without walls or floors, which are re-worked yearly for dry season occupancy. Their roofs were thatched palm and their beds were fashioned from bamboo with mosquito netting hooked above them.

Passing Triste, naked children ran to the edge of the bluff and stared at us. "Adíos," we yelled to them in Spanish, but the boy did not answer.

"Up-river, people are more primitive" Allen explained. "The children only know life here in the "monte" (the agricultural and hunting lands)...they don't speak Spanish...they don't wear clothes." Allen was adept at translating between cultures.

At the bend in the river called Chile, a woman ran to the edge of the bluff. She was screaming, "Did the Armac III leave yet?" (The Armac III was a lobster boat). Reinforcing her word for word was a man's frantic voice coming from behind.

"Aou," (Yes) Allen answered.

"Tingki," (A corruption of the English "thank-you") the woman yelled, "Tingki pali" (Thanks a lot).

"See how they are," Allen continued, "They're so isolated up-river." "The only source of outside information comes from other canoes passing by."

After a couple of hours we stopped at a bend in the river with a small beach with a bench stood sunken in the sand with a piece of laundry soap on top of it. This was Liwa-Raya. Climbing the slope to the bluff, we walked single file, carrying heavy loads and

stopped at the cooking shelter. The cook-house, a low pole-framed, thatch-roofed structure built directly on the ground, had a "fogon" or clay hearth, a shelf to store dishes, and a wooden rack above for provisions. Chickens, dogs, and cats scoured the patio for morsels of rice. Children ran behind them to chase them out of the kitchen and patio area. Behind the open fire in the cook house, Enemecia was making coffee and starting to prepare for dinner. Her father Octavio had gone hunting that day and killed a "teposquintle" (scientific name), a rodent widely sought for its savory meat.

That night three men approached in the dark--fellow monte men who shared meat with Octavio. They had somehow gotten word or scent of Octavio's kill. I helped Enemecia serve and clear their plates. I brought each of the men a washing bowl, waited for them to swish water around in their mouths and spit it out, and then pour the remaining water over their hands. Next I brought them coffee and sugar, waiting while they stirred. My working in a Miskito woman's kitchen and serving the male guests was a novel experience for me. On the coast Peter and I were waited on hand and foot.

By now, having studied Miskito before arrival and doing intensive study during our first month on the coast, I could understand much of what people said. After the mysterious mountain men came and left in darkness, I heard Allen ask Enemecia , "Do you have another man up here?" She scoffed back at him, "Me up here alone with my father and children and you on the coast drinking and carry-on with your girlfriends, and you have the nerve to ask me that."

At the other end of the patio, Octavio opened a bible and handed it to Enemecia's daughter, Rustelia. "Why don't you read to us." With a group of ten circling around her

in hammocks, benches and chairs, Rustelia read in Spanish. Mario, her brother, was in charge of keeping slivers of fragrant slow-burning "leña" (pieces of pine brought from the distant savanna) available for Rustelia to use like a candle. "Mario," Enemecia bellowed repeatedly as the leña burned out and interrupted her reading.

Around eight o'clock, the men then retired to the hammocks, to talk and smoke cigarettes while the children got ready for bed. After Peter had explained his work, Octavio agreed to take Peter and Allen into the woods the next day on one of his hunting trips. The family woke up by 4:30 a.m. By six o'clock Enemecia and Rustelia had cooked, served, and cleaned up breakfast; the children had already hauled water and chopped firewood for the day; and Peter, Allen, and Octavio left on a ten-mile-plus hunting trip in the pristine tall forests. Enemecia planned to work her fields; and I stayed around the patio area to write-up field notes.

"Rustelia," Enemecia turned to her daughter and smiled, "Do you want to work today?" Rustelia ran to the house, grabbed her gear, and returned to her mother. "Ready" she said. Rustelia and Enemecia wore pants under their dresses, wrapped their heads with bandannas (to keep insects out), and had machetes resting on their shoulders. "Mario," Enemecia said as an afterthought, "you stay here and watch the patio and children." Mario's lip quivered and he began to cry silently, having been reduced to baby sitter once again. Mario was twelve. Rustelia was thirteen; and she could still beat him in wrestling.

On the day that we left to return to the coast, Enemecia was sullen. While saying goodbye from the small beach at Liwa Raya, a canoe passed moving up-river. A woman said to Enemecia, "Your sister Tomassa said she can't come up this week because the

baby's still sick. She said she'll come next week." The woman nodded and continued poling up-river with her husband.

"Oh-yeah?" Enemecia laughed. "When will Tomassa ever come?"

Living in isolation up-river, Enemecia had adopted a certain level of antagonism toward her more social, coastal-dwelling sisters. She thought they made excuses not to come up-river. "The fields are cleaned, and still they don't come to plant," she repeated herself, "They've *already* been cleaned," emphasizing that she and Octavio had already done the hardest part of the work for planting.

As I stood in the canoe looking at Enemecia, I realized that she had acquired a sort of hardened state of mind--she was a single mother providing for her family by living off the land. She had retreated to the monte where she could provide her children with vegetables, grains, meat, and fish, in a "respectable" way by working the land. She did not want to earn money selling beer to lobster divers like her sisters did on the coast; in Enemecia's opinion, her sisters had sold out by turning their homes into bodegas.

"We'll be back," I said, while Allen shoved us off in our canoe.

"Oh-yeah" Enemecia quipped, "You're not gonna come back, you're going to forget about Liwa Raya." We floated backwards while Allen started the engine.

Holy Week in Liwa Raya

Easter 1991

We returned to Liwa Raya during Holy Week. Kuka Denecela's whole matrilocal compound was present, except for Delfina who watched over her "businesses" and their

houses on the coast. When we arrived, Kuka Denecela's daughters, Ilabia, Enemecia, and Tomassa, were fishing in a cut-off oxbow lake across the river, catching dinner for the barbecue and fish fry planned for that night.

An hour later, the sisters ascended the bluff balancing buckets on their heads. They were drenching wet, having waded and swum across the river in their clothes. "Where are your fish, Laura?" Enemecia taunted me as she passed by. She had caught me looking up longingly at what I hoped was our dinner. "Laura," she continued, "how are you going to feed Allen and Peter?" Once again, my gender role was in question.

"You have to learn how to cook or Peter's gonna leave you," Tomassa chimed in walking two steps behind Enemecia.

"You've had time here, you've got to at least cook for your man," Ilabia added while walking behind Tomassa. She continued, "The least you can do is to help cook for your husband."

With nothing to look forward to but burning eyes from the smoke and scorched fingers from fired pans, I penetrated the hearth. I noticed that Enemecia had thrown two fish filets on the pan without dipping them first in flour and said, "Whoever put these fish in the pan doesn't know how to cook."

"You're right, Laura," Tomassa added fuel to the fire. (She knew her sister Enemecia had put the fish in the pan.) Enemecia turned to face me.

I turned away nervously and said, "Enemecia, you're just jealous because I have two guys (Peter and Allen) and you don't have any."

Although I succeeded in making the sisters laugh, Enemecia really got angry. She quipped back at me, "Fine, if you have two men then you serve both of them.

Allen tried to make a joke, "Enemecia, a woman in the U.S. does not work, she is an adornment in the house."

"Is that true, Laura?" Enemecia said, staring directly at me. She then turned toward the fire, and said under her breath, "Give me a ticket then...I want to go."

I stood behind the hearth boiling water to make "kapi" (coffee). All the sisters delighted in bossing me around. I heard someone say, "Kapi, Laura" every second. Eventually, I served all twenty people. Just as I would finish one cup, Enemecia would say again, "Kapi, Laura," and I would begin again. After that, Enemecia began sending me produce in Kuri. Who knows, maybe in their eyes, by helping my "sisters" cook fish and serve coffee in Liwa Raya, I had finally defined my gender role within the kinship group. More and more, we felt like part of the community.

Girl's Night Out in Moskitia

Christmas 1995

I returned to Kuri for 6 weeks in 1995. I lived in Delfina's house while Peter was away working. Peter was employed as part of a team of consultants working for the German firm, Gesellschaft fur Agrarprojekte (GFA) to design a conservation project for the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve. While in the village, I bonded with the other "men-less" Miskito women who jokingly called themselves "piarkas" (widows) because their husbands were away working up-river and on lobster boats. We even had what I called

"girl's night out" to Two Man Disco, a recently opened hot spot in Utla Almuk. The disco was a raised, one room wooden structure with a generator-powered strobe light system, a refrigerator-freezer, and a jam box.

Some women who participated in the "girl's nights out" had been forbidden to go to Two Man Disco by their husbands. One moonless night, I had a conversation with Ilabia's husband Mindel, a lobster diver who had just returned to shore. Mindel was giving me the third degree, "Did you go to Two Man Disco sister-in-law? With who?" I felt a sharp pain in my back. Ilabia had covertly struck me to signal me not to say her name. Women, especially those of the same matrigroup, were expected to lie for each other, especially to the husbands and lovers.

Other women also began to include me in their marital deceptions. One sister in the matrigroup even used me in a series of cover-ups with her husband. My allegiance to this woman at times grew thin, especially since Peter and I were friends of her husband. And, I much preferred the husband to the boyfriend. A low point came when I was forced to stay the night with her in the neighboring town of New Jerusalem, just west of Kuri. I had no choice but to sleep in a stranger's house and share a bed with three children, while the unnamed woman slept with her boyfriend on a mattress in the cook house. As the soft rays of day break rolled across the sea, we walked home together on the beach, away from the village path where the eyes of speculation would be upon us.

The Making of a Miskito Mother

March, 1997

Entering the village in March 1997, it struck me that I had watched many of the children grow up, having held them as infants, played with them as toddlers on the beach, and now seeing them school-age. I was amazed by the children born after my last departure and surprised to see them playing the "squirrel game" that I made up years ago with their older siblings. It made me reflect on my influential presence in the village.

I first lived alone in Ilabia's house, who had recently separated form her husband Mindel. Over the course of my stay, Peter and I paid to build a relatively big house on part of Delfina's beach front property which tied into the patio of her own burgeoning matrigroup. The house was raised on posts with a rough hardwood floor, split palm walls, and a roof of tin; there was a balcony in the front and, on the side, a bath house, smaller porch, and a staircase (Figure 4.2). Cashew, berry, coconut, mango, and other fruit trees surrounded the house. Raised up like a bird house, I could even pick mangoes off of the tree from my back window. Delfina made me responsible for protecting the fruit trees. I often had to yell at passers-by from my balcony, "to leave my cashews alone," especially children who snatched what they could to eat along the east-west trail that passes through the dooryards of the community.

After moving into the new house, I acquired a new status as a head of household. My household survived on cash that Peter brought when he periodically visited me. In some ways, I identified with what it means to be a "buzo maia" (lobster diver's wife)--their husbands worked away from the village and returned home with money. My

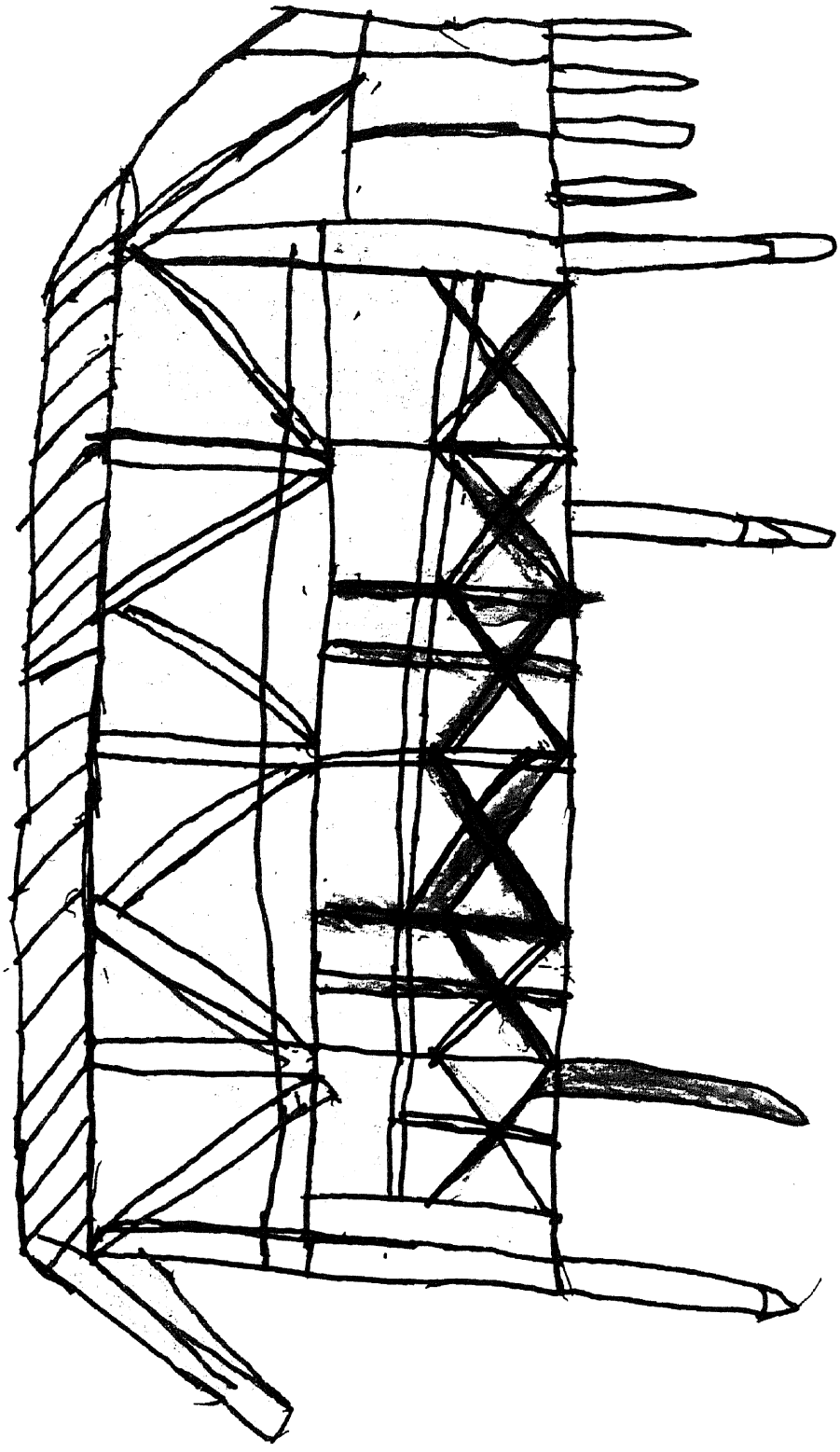

Figure 4.2 Drawing of Laura's House in Kuri (by Bujeron Mendelin)

husband Peter had come to Honduras to implement a participatory conservation project working again with the GFA consulting firm as part of the German financed (12 million dollars), six year Río Plátano Biosphere Project. When buzos (lobster divers) returned home, women were expected to have their homes clean, a meal cooked, and themselves and their children washed and well dressed. Of course, buzo maias were rarely caught off-guard and knew when to prepare for their husbands' arrival. They communicated with other women whose husbands were all on the same boat, received messages on short wave radios, and sighted their husband's returning boat from the beach.

Peter's arrivals, however, were not so carefully timed for me. One Sunday night I was at Tomassa's bodega drinking a beer with Allen (Peter's former guide). Ilabia ran up the steps with terror in her eyes. "Sister Laura, Peter just walked into Kuri and he's looking for you. I told him you were at church." Tomassa looked frightened for me and said, "Go quickly!...Run!" There was no way to explain to the sisters that Peter would not be mad at me for being out of the house and drinking beer with a man. After all, it was only Allen. For them, a Miskito husband's scolding or beating would be expected and they assumed Peter would do the same to me. The next day, the sisters perused my body parts for bruises, stupefied by the lack of evidence regarding my punishment.

Another time, Peter and his team of consultants and indigenous personnel apparently had a change of plans and zipped into Tampa Tigni Lagoon in the middle of the afternoon. And I was nowhere to be found. I was inside Kuka's house participating in a private healing party replete with music, beer, and dancing. The healing party revolved around a new age sukia (shaman), called "Planeta," that had a dubious reputation as a

charlatan and swindler. Many of the husbands would be infuriated by their wives partaking in such wanton, hedonistic behaviors, especially in the middle of the day. To make matters worse, the Kuka's house was located next to the church where the Pastor could potentially see or hear us.

Once the news hit Kuka's house that Peter had arrived, Tomassa seamlessly led me by the hand to the veranda, poured a complete tub of water over my head, and instructed me "tell him you were bathing." Kuka joined us and wrapped me in a towel. As I climbed down the stairs, Kuka followed me and doused me from behind with some of her cologne, a last minute attempt to hide the stench of debauchery.

As I forged allies along the coast, I never was caught off-guard again. I began to receive messages from friends who told me where he was along the trail to Kuri. And then, the moment comes when one heard open-hand thumps on the split-wood walls, accompanied by the final words of warning "maiam balan" (your husband's here).

Even though I had a similar lifestyle to a buzo maia, I had still not achieved full adult female status in the eyes of the Kuri women--I was not yet a mother. They thought it strange for a woman of my age (then, thirty-five) with no medical problems to not have children. They often asked me in bewilderment, "Who hauls your water? Who sweeps your floors? Who do you send to the store?"

Problem solved. Delfina "gave" me three boys from her compound--Marcos and Bujeron (both twelve years old) and Opni (a four year old)--to live with me. The boys kept me company, protected me, and worked--hauling water, sweeping floors, and

running errands to the store. Marcos was an orphan, Bujeron and Opni were the children of Ilabia and Mindel who had both left Kuri after a divorce, deserting four children.

Cousins of the same sex could be found sleeping together in any of the matrigroup's households; with bed sheets spread across the wooden floor boards. A group of young girls from Kuka Lyvian's neighboring matrigroup also occasionally came to my house at night. Her girls and my boys, who were second cousins, played locally recorded tapes of Miskito and Garífuna music on my jam-box and danced together until exhausted. The girls often slept over and I had to patrol the floor at night with a flashlight to make sure the boys were not "gateando" (night crawling or, literally, "catting") to the girls' side. They were, after all, kissing cousins.

Marcos, Bujeron, and all of the children of the matrigroup, called me "Anti"; but Opni, the youngest boy that lived with me, called me "Mama" or "Yapti." I was especially nurturing to this extremely small four year old. Opni, too young to be without a mother, and I, too old to be without children, became a special unit. He accompanied me almost everywhere, usually on my hip. With three children, a house, and a husband supporting me from afar, my status as an adult woman and female head of household began to take shape. This all added to my friendships with the sisters, other local women, and to my understanding as a cultural anthropologist. By the end of my stay, my days were filled with caring for children, socializing with an expanding group of sisters, and trying to fit in time to do interviews. The five short stories presented above are dedicated to the memory of Allen Rivens, our dedicated friend and guide.

Field Research

This study is a result of ethnographic fieldwork that took place in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve in 1991 (for six months), in 1995 (for six weeks), and in 1997-1998 (for a year and a half). During that time I lived in Kuri and traveled throughout the region engaging in participant observation, interviews, and the collection of ethnic terms of reference, songs, and incantations. The methods description is organized by the two theoretical constructions of identity and gender theory. My field research had two components focusing on 1) Inter-Ethnic Relations, and 2) Gender and Village Organization. My field research is divided into two parts. I study village organization and gender in the coastal village of Kuri and inter-ethnic relations in the broader reserve region. My data on the two parts were collected simultaneously while I lived in Kuri and traveled to other areas of the reserve, including mixed villages where the Miskito live with the Tawahka, Pech, Garífuna, Ladinos, Isleños, and Creoles. I used my combined linguistic abilities in English, Spanish, and Miskito in daily conversations and during interviews. The Creoles and Isleños speak English, the Ladinos speak Spanish (the national language taught in schools that functions as the region's lingua franca); and the Miskito, Tawahka, and Pech, and other Creoles and Isleños who live along the north coast speak Miskito, the indigenous lingua-franca of the reserve. I had a base knowledge of Miskito when I arrived for my dissertation research and continued to study the language while living there.

Part One: Inter-Ethnic Relations

At the regional level, I studied inter-ethnic relations to show how the Miskito construct their identity during inter-ethnic relations with Others in the reserve. Regionally, I study inter-ethnic relations, collecting and analyzing ethnic terms of reference spoken by groups. I collect cultural markers, including ethnic terms of reference, language use, and stereotypes that Miskito individuals used to define themselves in relation to Others. To complete this part of my study, I conducted interviews in one of each ethnic group's village using a representative sample set of fifteen Miskito and non-Miskito residents to investigate inter-ethnic relations. I asked individuals questions related to the following socio-linguistic indicators.

a. language choice in context--the situations in which individuals choose to speak particular languages;

b. ethnic terms of reference--labels used to classify oneself and others;

c. stereotypes, jokes, and folklore--which groups use to describe themselves and others;

d. social status hierarchies--high-low prestige rankings of all ethnic groups and more qualitative questions, such as: "who would you most like to marry and why?"

During my interviews, I asked individuals from all groups to rank all culture groups in the reserve from higher to lower in social prestige and questions pertaining to preferred marriage partners. However, I only reveal the social status hierarchy and data on preferred marriage partners recorded among the Miskito individuals. I was originally interested in ethnic labels after hearing the words to a Miskito song, "Meriki Kuka Nani" (American grandmothers). The song and dance of "Meriki Kuka Nani" are performed by

the Miskito during traditional Christmas celebrations and their more recent tambacos (night-time gatherings with dancing, singing, and guitar and drum playing that begins a few months before Christmas and lasts through New Year's Day). "Meriki Kuka Nani" is a verse add on song (said to be introduced by missionary George Heath) that continues only if a singer can think of a different ethnic label than the one sung in the previous verse. The total number of possible verses (using different ethnic terms) produces a cognitive map of all "Others" known by the Miskito (Sanjeck 1971, 1977; Southall 1976). The song also continues by reciting other kinship terms in the place of the word kuka.

Meriki Kuka Nani

Miskito kuka nani, bal suskam dinki daiks
mulam tiara aikuki na puli na bal kaiks

American Grandmothers

American grandmothers, come here putting your shoes on and off
with their teenage granddaughters dancing and playing with each other

The singer interchanges "Miskito" with other ethnic terms: "Paya" (Pech), "Karibi" (Garifuna), "Ispael" (Ladino), "Kriol" (Creole or English-speaking Black), "Sumu" (Tawahka), "Musti" (Bay Islander or Isleño), "Meriki" (North American), "Indian" (Indian), "Yerman" (German), "England" (British), "Shinese" (Chinese), and "Turko" (Arab).

I recorded and defined these ethnic labels that Miskito-speakers used to refer to each group in the song. Once aware of these for the Miskito, I then asked the other

culture groups the terms of reference that they used to refer to themselves and Others in their own language and in Spanish. This produced a smorgasbord of ethnic terms that each group uses and receives (Table 5.2). Speakers ascribe a term of reference to a recipient based on perceived ethnicity or group identity of the Other. Because of the socio-cultural diversity in the area, native speakers must rely on a wide range of background cultural knowledge to ascribe ethnic labels correctly (Jackson 1983).

My field research on inter-ethnic relations in the broader reserve region shows how Miskito individuals create situational ethnic identities when interacting with indigenous and ethnic Others. This research searches for the system of social classification used by the Miskito peoples to define themselves in relation to Others in the RPBR. Miskito individuals have a broad range of cultural knowledge and can effectively manipulate various cultural markers during social interactions (Barth 1982; Hymes 1972). Research also viewed the new ways Miskito construct their identities since having entered into more global conservationist discourses as residents of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve

Analysis of the ethnic terms also shows the situational nature of identity in the culturally plural social environment, focusing on the variety of identities that people construct during different ethnic encounters. Analyzing the ethnic markers and stereotypes of the communities in Moskitia will also show how identities gain authenticity and become meaningful for participants in the present (Taussig 1993). Manning Nash (1989) believes "ethnic markers," especially "recursive metaphors," metaphors of blood, bed, and cult, become iconic through emotional referencing and are

used as stereotypes during social interactions. Nash's symbolic and cognitive approach provides a model that accounts for identity on the Miskito Coast.

Part Two: Gender and Village Organization

Most of my time was spent in Kuri studying the social and economic organization of the village and gender. Following in the tradition of long-term ethnographic research in cultural anthropology, I used participant observation, questionnaires, and interviews to gather data. In Kuri, I collected and analyzed social and economic data of the village through interviews and questionnaires, focusing on marriage, household composition, kinship, inheritance, descent, and claimed ethnicity. I also collected data on the current "boom" economies, household economy, division of labor by sex, divers in Kuri households and a case study of a matrigroup.

Kuri has 25 households that are divided into 5 greater matrilocal groups. I became a close friend with the individuals of one matrilocal group, detailing their everyday life based on my interactions with them. I also conducted two interviews with every woman of childbearing age in every household in Kuri. My open-ended questionnaire included:

a. marriage--level of exogamy (village, region, ethnic group); post-marital residence (matrilocal, patrilocal, neo-local); and type of union (monogamy, serial partners);

b. kinship--genealogies; family histories; and family social groups;

c. household composition--census of members (age, sex, religion, relationship of household members); household type (female-headed, nuclear, extended);

d. household economy--access and control of resources (agricultural items, meat, cash-earning labors, health, and education) and reciprocity networks; lobster divers in the household; work opportunities;

e. ascribed ethnicity--languages spoken and ethnic affiliation of each household member.

My field research on village organization in Kuri detailed how women lived together in matrilocal groups where they raised their children while the men were away working. Miskito women in Kuri also displayed a high level of "female autonomy." Grandmothers, called kukas, held the highest status in villages where they gained resources, status, and prestige from their children and greater descent group.

When I lived in Kuri during my first 1991 field season, I overestimated Miskito women's power in society. After returning for my dissertation research and investigating household economies, I realized that gender-power relations were more complex. Women may have held high positions of power within their kinship groups, but men worked as deep-water lobster-divers, retaining the ultimate authority as society's main wage earners. Therefore, my research characterizes Miskito society by their ambiguous "female autonomy" and "male authority" gender-power complex.

While living in Kuri, I also documented ethnographic data on how Miskito individuals construct their gender identities, focusing on sexuality and power. Once cued into the fact that different gender ideologies operated simultaneously, I noticed that women displayed a linguistic heteroglossia (they had distinct ways-of-speaking). They spoke one way when interacting with men and women in public contexts, and another

way when in their households or with their sisters. Miskito women in Kuri, then, switch back and forth between distinct discourses of gender ideologies in their everyday lives.

As windows to view the different discourses of gender ideologies at play in coastal villages like Kuri, I recorded texts from two speech genres. One is called "praiday saihka" incantations that women use to make (supernatural potions) to control men, and the other, "buzo lawankas" (lobster divers' songs) that Miskito men sing about themselves. Primarily in chapters eight and nine, texts of incantations and songs are presented and examined to understand how gender, power, and sexuality are mutually constructed for Miskito residents of the Plátano Biosphere Reserve. However, chapter ten also presents women's incantations as a strategic and subversive discourse, a contestation to the male-dominant gender ideology that surrrounds the buzo economy.

Today, feminist anthropologists studying gender, power, and social relations are beginning to change their focus, from being on power and domination to concentrating on differences in gender identities. Many look to the production of language as the starting point for understanding these differences. In addition to examining Miskito women's speech practices as subversive discourse, an issue related to power and domination, my work also uses language as a tool to understand gender differences.

I recorded all the incantations and songs on cassettes. I would first transcribe a text in Miskito and then translate it to Spanish and then again to English. Because my Spanish was better than my Miskito, I used the Spanish versions to verify translations with the divers, Doña Meri, and other locals who spoke Miskito and Spanish. Most texts presented are shorter versions of the longer incantations and songs. I take liberties with

the song texts by using the pertinent verses to the topic being discussed. The incantations are also abbreviated versions, as most are long and would take upwards of two to three pages to include. My reason for shortening the texts is to make them less cumbersome, however, their ethnographic integrity remains intact. All of the women's incantations appear in chapter nine, and many of the buzo or lobster divers songs appear in chapter eight. However, the lobster divers' songs contain a large body of cultural information and are used as data throughout the dissertation to support arguments and to enrich ethnographic description.

Collecting Buzo Songs

I collected most of these songs at my house working with a few Kuri buzos. It was lucky that two of the best Miskito musicians and singers lived in Kuri. Wilinton Suarez and Eucevio Guevarra had recorded cassettes in Honduran cities with the Miskito teacher, musician, and political leader Modesto Morales in various development projects of national organizations and NGOs. The men came to my house with their guitars several times during my stay to record on my small, but efficient Sony recorder-cassette player. These events turned into private parties and select villagers attended as well as the children living in my household. They were festive occasions, but we kept the group fairly small to control the level of background noise. Because Wilinton and Eucevio had no other recordings of their music (since their other tapes had been lost, stolen, or damaged), they had vested interest in these sessions, which enabled them to make copies of my cassette for their own enjoyment, as gifts to others, and to sell.

The two eloquent musicians had different Kuri lobster divers and canoe men with them each time. Their friends also sang along and helped me change the cassettes and batteries. Sometimes, when Wilinton and Eucevio were flat broke and wanted to get drunk, they would hint around that they felt like recording that night. They knew that I would provide them with beers, cigarettes, and a good tip as long as they were singing into the microphone. They seemed not to know the titles of many of their songs because they referred to them only by their first line or a woman's name. While these songs may have had other names, I titled the songs the way Wilinton and Eucevio did. The young men were also song-writers who made up songs as they sang, improvised with lyrics, and rarely performed a song the same way twice. In fact, I collected different versions of many of the same songs.

Collecting Praidey Saihka Incantations

Praidey saihka is part of the most highly guarded realms of Miskito society that is not open to outsiders. Powerful grandmothers, called kukas,[7] are respected and feared by others in society for possessing knowledge of praidey saihka. Recipes, prayers, and songs used to make praidey saihka are passed down through the female line and are a central component of Miskito cultural identity and "female autonomy" in coastal villages (Herlihy 1996a). Whenever I tried to broach the subject of praidey saihka with Kuka Denecela and her daughters, they usually put me off. Most women denied using praidey saihka. They would not talk openly during interviews about the topic. Discussing these matters was seen as dangerous and irresponsible.

Elders lectured their children about the dangers of praidey saihka, imploring them to always lie about using them. Because fear of "black magic" runs high in Miskito society, elders claimed that an enemy who discovers that you are using a potion may suspect that you are using it to harm him. He may then retaliate by using a poison to harm or kill you. Speculation and uncertainty always surrounds supernatural potions. Kuka Denecela repeatedly used to warn me, "if you keep talking about praidey saihka you're going to end up dead."

One day I remember joking with Kuka Denecela's grandchildren that the Kuka was going to teach me praidey saihka. Kuka came out of nowhere and pinned me against the wall of her house, with her hands around my neck. She glared down at me asking, "did I hear you mention praidey saihka again?" And then she waited, giving me a chance to lie. I mouthed the words from under her firm grip, "No Kuka." She released me saying, " I didn't think so."

Praidey saihka, obviously, is a highly secretive endeavor for the Kuka. She relies on these potions to induce gifts from divers, which often kept her household afloat. Once cognizant of being tricked and manipulated by a woman's potions, a man could access a counteractive remedy to free himself from her control. Men fear being controlled by women and their potions and stay away from those known for having this expertise.

Because of the difficulties in collecting recipes and incantations for praidey saihkas, I worked with a woman from another village to gather this information. She was a respected elder, called Doña Meri, who was used to working with outsiders. Doña Meri was from New Jerusalem and frequently collaborated with MOPAWI (the local

development organization) providing traditional knowledge regarding plant cures, songs, and dances. She was great to work with because people knew she was helping me for the right reasons--for the documentation of Miskito culture and language--and not because she was making potions for me to use on them. Also, I did not have to complicate any of my relationships with the women in Kuka Denecela's matrigroup by entering into this sensitive dialogue with them. After having learned from Meri the names of the praidey saihkas, situations to use them, and their recipes and incantations, I was able to weave my understanding of these into conversations with the women of Kuka Denecela's matrigroup and of greater Kuri. While no one seemed to have wanted the responsibility of teaching me about praidey saihka, once I knew about it, the local women talked openly about how these potions affected the daily lives of villagers.

Data and Analysis

The data presented on social organization in Kuri shows that Miskito identity is passed down in matrilocal groups. My analysis shows that Miskito women living in matrilocal groups play important roles in society as creators and recreators of social identities and kinship practices. Other data that reveals how Miskito individuals construct situational ethnic and gender identities in the reserve is socio-linguistic and more nuanced in nature. Exchange encounters between individuals of Miskito and non-Miskito ethnicity in the broader reserve region and between men and women in daily village life are highlighted. My analysis of the socio-linguistic data reveals the situations in which Miskito women construct various ethnic and gender identities.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. The 1989 LSU fieldtrip was organized around the CLAG (Conference of Latin American Geographers) meeting in Querétero. Peter was one of many on the trip that were giving papers at the conference. I was not an official field trip participant, but was just catching a nearly free ride to Mexico--I was embarking on the second summer of my MA thesis field research in Morelos where I studied the socio-linguistics of bargaining and barter in outdoor markets (supported by Robert C. West grants). Thanks to Bill Davidson, the leader and organizer of the field trip, for giving me permission to go with them. Davidson made me pay eight dollars and fifty-cents for the ride (I have no idea why) and he loves to tell people that I still owe him!

2. Following a December 1990 wedding in New Orleans, we spent our ersatz honeymoon in Moskitia for six months where Peter had a Fulbright grant to do research, and we have returned to Kuri and Moskitia over the years, including my 1997-1998 field research.

3. For other gendered ethnographies, Knauft (1996:222) defines the genre and cites Abu-Lughod 1986, 1993; Behar 1993; Kondo 1990; Kratz 1994; Lancaster 1992; Lavie 1990; Povinelli 1993; Raheja and Gold 1994; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Wolf 1992.

4. By 1997, there would be one pick-up truck used as a collective taxi.

5. Sixto was our original contact here, introduced to us by Fernando Cruz, then, the head Ethnologist at the Honduran Museum of Anthropology and History (INAH).

6. By 1995, plastic lawn chairs became a common household item and the village had two water pumps.

7. The plural of a noun in Miskitu is normally constructed by the singular form followed by the word nani. For example, kuka nani and sika nani mean grandmothers and medicines respectfully.

Chapter Five: Ethnic Terms and Inter-Ethnic Relations in the RPBR

This chapter relates directly to one of my research objectives--it shows how Miskito individuals in the Plátano Biosphere construct situational ethnic identities. The first section of this chapter, "Ethnic Labels and Stereotypes" reveals the more generalized situational and even inverted uses of identity by all the groups in the reserve. The other two sections, "Social Status Hierarchy and "Preferred Marriage Partners," reveals the contexts in which Miskito individuals mobilize particular identities for social, economic, and political gain.

The Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve

The Plátano Miskito people's villages along the north coast are located within the limits of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (RPBR), an internationally recognized conservation region. UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (UN-MAB) program has established 300 biosphere reserves world wide, their goal being to protect the natural and cultural heritage of these regions for all humankind (Halffter 1985). UNESCO established the RPBR in 1980, the first such reserve established in Central America, because of the natural and cultural diversity within its borders. The RPBR (Figure 1.2) covers a large tract of pristine rainforest and coastal-lagoonal terrain, including over 8,000 kilometers of the most beautiful natural habitats in Central America. The reserve is also home to many different culture groups, including three indigenous groups (Miskito, Pech, and Garífuna) totaling over 18,000

individuals, with over 20,000 Ladino colonists, and other minor ethnic groups, including the English-speaking Creoles and Isleños (Herlihy 2001).

The Tawahka Sumu legalized and gained title to their separate homeland, Tawahka Asagni (Herlihy 1993, Cruz 1994, McSweeney 2000). The Tawahka also attempt to establish their own Tawahka Biosphere Reserve along the southeastern border of the RPBR, linking the Río Plátano Biosphere and the Tawahka Biosphere with the Nicaraguan Reserve, Bosawas. Together, this would connect all of the reserves and protect the cultural and biodiversity of the Mosquitia Rain Forest Corridor (Herlihy 1997a:102), home to much of Central America's last vestiges of rainforest terrain and indigenous language and culture.

During the first decade the reserve was established, RENARE (The Honduran Department of Renewable Resources) managed the reserve. A director and small number of park rangers worked in the region. RENARE, however, suffered from poor administration, exacerbated by the remote region's poor transportation and communication networks. At this time, the reserve seemed to exist only on paper and most of the residents did not even know they lived in a reserve (Herlihy 2001:6).

Things have improved for the reserve since the DAPVS unit of AFE/COHDEFOR, the State Forestry Agency, took over the administration of the reserve in 1991, establishing a management office in Palacios. Also in 1991, COHDEFOR worked with the German Development Bank (KFW) to expand the reserve's boundaries (Figure 1.2). The extension along the coast from Río Plátano

eastward to Patuca has almost doubled the number of Miskito in the reserve. About half of all Honduran Miskito peoples live within the present day boundaries of Plátano Biosphere Reserve (Herlihy 2001).

Today residents are more aware of the reserve and of their status as reserve residents, mainly through MOPAWI and Peace Corps projects. Because the reserve is playing an increasingly important role in the lives of its Miskito residents, my research evaluates how living in the RPBR affects Miskito identity construction. Therefore, this study breaks methodological ground by examining how Miskito identity and inter-ethnic relations are constructed within the boundaries of an internationally designated, conservation region. Although tied to one village and region, then, my work considers more global processes of identity construction for indigenous peoples living in protected areas. Establishing pluri-ethnic protected areas like the Plátano Biosphere Reserve may be a successful way of accommodating ethnic groups seeking semi-autonomous homelands in Central America.

The Miskito, the largest indigenous population in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, have a population of 17,874. Their villages and agricultural and hunting lands lie along the north coast and along three main rivers in the reserve--the Patuca, Plátano, and Tinto. Barra Patuca (population 2,237) and Brus Laguna (1,811) are the two largest Miskito communities. Several Miskito towns have populations around 1,000. However, most Miskito settlements are small villages of around two-hundred people or dispersed family settlements along the river's shore. (Herlihy 2001:102).

The Pech, an indigenous rain-forest tribe, live in two different regions of the biosphere (GFA 1998) with a total population of 479. Their main villages are located in the Las Marías area located along the middle Río Plátano, where 501 people live. However, mainly due to mixing with the Miskito, only 153 inhabitants identify themselves as Pech. The Pech in the southwestern corner of the reserve live in the two settlements of Jocomico (pop. 110) and Culco (pop. 152) where about three-fourths of the residents in each village consider themselves Pech.

The Garífuna and Miskito, two of the biggest indigenous groups in Central America, have settlement patterns that overlap in the Northwestern corner of the reserve. The historic cultural buffer zone between the Garífuna and Miskito consists of a four mile stretch of beach and lagoonal lands between Limón, the Miskito's most western coastal settlement and Plaplaya, the easternmost most Garífuna village. Plaplaya is technically the only Garífuna village within the reserve's western boundary, however, other villages lie just west of the boundary and use lands within the reserve. Plaplaya is a mixed village with 421 residents; 71% Garífuna, 22% Ladino, and 6% Miskito. Plaplaya includes a historic Miskito neighborhood (called "Sambal") which has maintained Miskito culture and language since the early 1900s. Miskito-Garífuna marriages are only common in this one neighborhood. Therefore, Miskito culture is not wide-spread throughout the Garífuna-dominated village.[1]

There are two Ladino populations that occupy different parts of the reserve. Along the Paulaya River a Ladino population of 5,019 can be found and in the

southwestern corner of the reserve, 15,000 residents live near the Wampu and Paulaya Rivers' headwaters (Herlihy 2001:104-106). The Ladino population along the Río Paulaya has grown due to the many new colonists who have entered the Paulaya valley. However, some of the Paulaya Ladinos have historically lived in the region. These Spanish-speakers, or so-called "bananeros," are the descendants of Ladinos who worked in the banana industry during the first half of the 20th century. However, there has been a dramatic increase in the Ladino population that has recently colonized the south-west corner of the reserve. A small number of Ladinos and mixed Black and White English-speakers are also found scattered throughout the reserve's northern zone where they intermarry with local indigenous groups. In general, English-speaking Blacks are called "Creoles" and English-speaking Whites are called "Isleños." One historic "Creole" village, called Payabila, exists in the northern zone with a population of about 60 (Herlihy and Herlihy 1991).

The reserve's major indigenous and ethnic groups, the Miskito, Pech, Garífuna, and Ladinos have historically inhabited different regions, separated by cultural buffer zones. Today, however, the indigenous and ethnic groups are not physically isolated from one another, but live in a complex distribution whereby patterns of settlement and resource exploitation overlap. In the northern zone, the Miskito extend into all other ethnic group's culture regions and live in mixed villages; and in the southern zone, the recent arrival of the large population of Ladino

colonists has heightened the effects of hegemonic influence from the national culture, and also modernization and westernization in the reserve.

Spanish functions as the reserve's "lingua franca" because of its stature as the national language, taught locally in elementary schools. Miskito, the most widely spoken indigenous language in the reserve, is spoken in all of the villages in the northern zone where Miskito people intermarry and reside alongside Garífuna, Creole, Ladino, and Pech Others. Just beyond reserve boundaries, the Miskito also live in mixed-villages with the Tawahka Sumu along the middle-Patuca.

The Pech, Tawahka, Creole, and Isleño children are generally tri-lingual, speaking their own language at home, Miskito in the village, and Spanish in the classrooms. In the recent past, Tawahka villages such as Wampusirpe have assimilated to Miskito culture and language. However, Tawahka villages like Krausirpe today fight back against assimilation due to the emergent Tawahka identity. Pech is the most threatened language today due to assimilation to Miskito language and culture. While the Miskito, for the most part, dominate the Pech, Tawahka, Creoles, and Isleños within and just beyond the reserve, they do not exert the same influence over their Garífuna and Ladino neighbors. As a whole, the Garífuna and Ladinos are the only two groups in the reserve that resist assimilation to, and being dominated by, Miskito culture and language.

Ethnic Labels and Stereotypes

This investigation searches for the indigenous categories that the Miskito use to distinguish between themselves as a group and Others in the RPBR. I first analyze ethnic labels (both ascriptive and prescriptive), by which individuals structure their environment and govern relations with Others. My analysis of the broad spectrum of the ethnic labels used in the region highlights the actor's system of classification, revealing the indigenous system of identity that operates in the Plátano Biosphere.

The following section describes the ethnic identity of each culture group within the reserve and analyzes the various ethnic labels ascribed and prescribed by the different speech communities, including the Miskito, Pech, Garifuna, Creoles, Isleños, and Ladinos. Although I do not present ethnic terms used by the Tawahka peoples because they are technically outside of the Plátano reserve's limits, they will be included in my examination of inter-ethnic relations because of their historic and current day interactions with the Miskito. The more general situational uses of identity that occur in the reserve are seen through the various labels that ethnic groups use to refer to themselves and each other. Presenting a variety of ethnic slurs and racial and behavioral stereotypes should also help to capture the nuances of living on the culturally diverse Miskito Coast.

The Miskito

The Miskito population has grown from 1000 in the mid 1600s (W, M. 1732) to probably around 175,000 today, being the third largest indigenous group in Central America. Already in the process of miscegenation during the early seventeenth century, they expanded during the colonial era by "absorbing" other indigenous and ethnic groups along the coast. The Honduran Miskito continue incorporating outside elements into their culture today; they exchange resources and intermarry with the Tawahka Sumu, Pech, Garífuna, Ladinos, Creoles, and Isleños. Because the Miskito are such a mixed population, *being* Miskito in Honduras is far from a 'primordial' category based solely on ancestry, but reflects cultural and linguistic criteria. In the words of a woman from Kuri, "we are sambos, mestizos, and mulattos, we are mixed. We are Miskito because we speak Miskito."

Because individuals vary physically and claim different ancestries, being Miskito is not defined by race or ancestry alone. Miskito individuals claim various different ancestries and differ in physical appearance between "taya siksa" (black skinned), "taya pauni" (red skinned), and "taya pihini" (white skinned), categories that correspond to local racial constructions of Black, Indian, and White. Despite these significant physical differences, they all speak Miskito, identify themselves as Miskito, and have a strong sense of ethnic identity and pride. Being Miskito is mostly defined by cultural and linguistic criteria, most important of which is speaking the Miskito language (Conzemius 1932; Helms 1970, 1971, 1977). The Miskito most

often call themselves "Miskito"[2] in their own language (Table 5.2). The Plátano Miskito also call themselves waikna (man or person) or upla (person or people). After a Cessna plane lands in Belén, locals ask each other in Miskito," upla an balan?" (how many people arrived?), referring to the number of Miskito individuals that landed in the plane (Elmor Wood 1999, personal communication).

The English-speaking Creoles and Isleños call the Miskito, "Miskito Indians"; the Pech call them "Kumaja" (translation unknown); and the Garífuna call them many slang terms, including "Idudu" (fish or fish people) most often heard locally. Ladinos call the Miskito "Sambos," which is used most frequently by all groups in the reserve when speaking in Spanish. Technically defined, "Sambo" is the offspring of an Indian and a Negro. But, in the reserve, "Sambo" is used in a derogatory way by all Spanish-speakers to refer to the whole Miskito culture group and to its individual members. Thus, Spanish-speakers racialized the Miskito as Blacks and Indians, a mixture of the two least prestigious social groups in the colonial legacy of Latin America (Williams 1991). Whitten and Corr (1999:225-226) contend:

> Black and Indian mixes produced the *zambo*, or "black Indian," a cultural status that permeates colonial accounts of dangerous people. The danger emerges because of the absence of genetic mediation of whiteness and, consequently, a blend of savagery in a conjoining of ethnic antipodes.

While the Miskito also have White or Anglo ancestry from intermarriages with the British, other Europeans, and Creoles on the coast during the colonial era, their ethnic label stresses only their less prestigious Black and Indian ancestries. The label

"Miskito" is used in Spanish only during polite or formal conversations. Analysis shows that similar to the colonial era, the Miskito people are assigned to different socio-racial categories by English and Spanish speakers, being called Indian by English-speakers, and Zambo, emphasizing their Black ancestry, by Spanish-speakers.

The Miskito in the reserve create situational identities when interacting with their neighbors, demonstrated by the variety of ethnic labels they are called. Because the Miskito are of mixed ancestry, they are often assigned to different socio-racial categories depending on who they are interacting with and the context of the interaction. Most significantly, the Miskito are called "Sambo" by all groups in the reserve when speaking Spanish, an ethnic term that refers to their Indian and Black ancestries, but are called "Indian" in English, an ethnic term that refers to their Amerindian ancestry.

The Pech

The Pech are an indigenous people that existed prior to European contact (Davidson 1994; Sampson 1997). They reportedly remained relatively un-mixed during the colonial era, intermarrying little with Blacks and Europeans. Even today, they are the most physically "Indian looking" group in the region, with copper-colored skin and straight black hair. In the last century, however, the Pech have intermarried with Ladinos and, more recently, with the Miskito. The Miskito crossed the historical cultural boundary of the historic Pech zone of Las Marías at Kiajkimina in the early

1940s and entered the Pech area of the Plátano to work as laborers for foreign companies there that were extracting rubber. Since then, Miskito language and culture has dominated Pech society. I collected genealogies in Pujulak, which showed predominantly mixed-Pech and Miskito marriages since the 1940s. At this time, mainly Miskito men who worked in the region extracting rubber began to intermarry with Pech women. Therefore, the Las Marías area is an example of how the Miskito group expanded not only because women, but also men, intermarried with Others.

Despite Miskito miscegenation and infiltration into the Las Marías zone, the Pech culture is still strong because of recent wider indigenous movements that inspired a resurgence in Pech ethnic pride. The immigration of twenty Pech families from Olancho in 1990 has also helped reinvigorate the culturally distinct identity of the Las Marías zone. These 42 Pech from Olancho have helped the preservation of Pech culture and language. Today, there also exists an initiative to teach the Pech language in the communities. Resurgence in ethnic pride is evidenced in children of mixed-marriages who trace descent increasingly to their Pech ancestors. The surname Mejía has been traced for seven generations, alternating through the male and female line to claim Pech ethnicity and ancestry. Some members even claimed the surname twice, referring to themselves, for example, as "Jose Mejía Mejía" to evoke their authentic "Pechness."

An earlier study of the reserve's inhabitants (RENARE 1980) reported that there were 17 "pure" Pech in the region, but did not document the number of people who claim Pech ancestry and heritage or who identify their ethnicity as Pech. My data from 1991 shows that almost 253 residents, or about half of the Las Marías population, claim Pech ancestry. GFA (1998) figures the total population is 501. Many who are part Pech marry others who are part Pech and their off-spring can claim Pech ancestry on both their mother and father's side. Based on the genealogies collected in the Las Marías area in 1991, the amount of claimed Pech ancestry is shown below.

% Pech claimed	#
0 -- 24.9%	24
25 -- 49.9%	72
50 -- 74.9%	54
75 -- 99.9%	16

Table 5.1 Claimed Pech Ancestry

And although 253 people claimed to have Pech ancestry, only 153 people identified themselves culturally as Pech in a census taken in 1997 (GFA 1998; Herlihy 2001).

The terms of reference for the Pech are "Paya" (in Spanish, Miskito, and Central American English) and "Fayana" (in Garífuna). Although the Pech have

always called themselves the "Pech" or "Pech-ca," meaning people, while speaking in their native language, the term "Pech" has only very recently been adopted for broad use through their political organization. Increasingly, the Pech claim that the most common ethnic label used by others to refer to them, "Paya," is a derogatory term that means wild savage. The Pech are perceived by Others in the reserve as being the oldest and purest Indigenous group, being the least mixed of the region's rain-forest peoples. The Las Marías Pech trace their ancestry to the remote headwaters of the Río Plátano and some even claim they are the descendants of the ancient residents of Ciudad Blanca and other archaeological ruins hidden deep in Moskitia's rain forest.

The Garífuna

The Garífuna trace their ancestry to a mixture of Island Caribs on St. Vincent of the Lesser Antilles who intermarried with African slaves and who were later deported to Honduras in 1797. Their Afro-Caribbean culture and Arawakian language, called Garífuna, is spoken in Plaplaya, the only Garífuna settlement in the Plátano Biosphere. The Garífuna were widely known as Black Caribs or "Caribe Negro" in the past, but younger generations today have adopted the term "Garífuna" for all legal and political matters. They have also more recently embraced a racialized identity as Blacks in Latin America and see themselves increasingly as part of the African American diaspora (Anderson 2001; Bonner 1999).

The Garífuna, like the Miskito, are a very successful group that expanded their population and territory along the coast during the colonial era. The Miskito culture area's westward boundary is Black River, followed by a ten kilometer uninhabited transition zone before the eastern border of the Garífuna culture area begins at the village of Plaplaya. From here, their culture area extends northwestwardly from there along the coast through Guatemala to Belize. Therefore, the Garífuna, only occupy lands on the northwestern fringe of Moskitia. Thus, the Miskito are the dominant indigenous group in the Honduran Moskitia, which remains the Miskito homeland.

Garífuna refer to themselves as "Garifuna," but are called "Karibi" by Miskito-speakers, "Karabe" by Pech-speakers, "Morenos" by Spanish-speakers, and "Carib" by Central American English-speakers (Table 5.2). "Moreno" is used to refer to Garífuna individuals and the group by all ethnic and indigenous groups in the reserve when speaking Spanish (Table 5.3). "Moreno," meaning brown or dark, is not necessarily a derogatory term when used in endearing greetings or expressions, such as, "Hola morenito!", between Garífuna friends. It is, however, disrespectful when used to refer to another's ethnic identity. The ultimate term used in Spanish to show disrespect to a Garífuna person is "Negro."

The Central American English-Speakers

Mixed-White and Black populations reside on the reserve's north coast and speak a variety of Central American English dialects (Holm 1978). English-speaking

populations are subdivided into two principal groups in the Plátano Biosphere. First, the "Creole," are part of the English-speaking Blacks from the Caribbean who today commonly mix with Miskitos. These Creoles are perceived by other ethnic groups as speaking proper English or "Inglés fino." They have many family and economic connections to Creole settlements in Roatán (for more on Creoles in Nicaragua, see Hale and Gordon 1987; Gordon 1998).

Creoles are referred to as "Kriol" (in Miskito), "Tersu" (in Pech), "Guiou" (in Garifuna), "Negro" (by the Isleños), and "Creole" (by themselves). They are derogatorily called "Negros" by all groups when speaking in Spanish (Table 5.3). Spanish-speakers refer to the Creoles as "Inglés Negros" (Ingleses de habla Español) in polite contexts, but the Creoles still consider this term derogatory because it racializes them, unlike the term "Creole," which in their eyes, more favorably culturizes them. They consider the terms "English," "British," and "Islander" the most polite and acceptable ethnic terms.

The second major English-speaking population are called "Isleños" in Spanish, or 'Islanders" in English, referring to their previous home and heritage in the Bay Islands (Iglesias 2001; Stonich 2001). Isleños claim descent from English-speaking Whites and mixed Black and White populations. While the English-speaking Bay Islanders have their larger settlements on Roatán, Utila, and Guanaja, the smaller populations of English-speakers that live along the north coast of the Plátano Biosphere intermarry mostly with the Miskito. Children from these unions speak

some Creole English, Miskito, and Spanish. Their English-language skills and sometimes, lighter skin set them apart from other Miskito people.

Isleños are called "Musti" by the Miskito, "Turucawa" by the Pech, "Wadabu" by the Garífuna, and "Caracol" by the Spanish. Isleños identify themselves mostly as "English" in their own language, but also as "British" or "Islander." In Spanish, other groups call them "Inglés" although they prefer to be called "Isleño." All of the reserve groups called them "caracol" while speaking in Spanish in most contexts. The Miskito term "Musti," the Garífuna term "Wadabu," the Pech term "Tururcawa," and the Spanish term, "Caracol," all translate as 'conch.' Locals claim that Isleños, who live and work along the coast, look like sea shells because of their lighter, sunburned skin and bleached-out hair.

Ladinos

Ladinos are part of the national Spanish-speaking catholic, mestizo culture that resulted from the mixing of aboriginals with Spaniards on the Honduran mainland during the colonial era. In the northern part of the Plátano Biosphere, some Ladinos live dispersed among the Miskito, Pech, and Garífuna villages. They often act as economic middlemen or cultural brokers between the reserve residents and the outside world's market economy and own stores or other coastal businesses. Other Ladino families live along the western boundary of the reserve in the Paulaya Valley. The oldest families there are descendants of United Fruit Company workers who

remained after banana production declined. Many of these Ladino families live similarly to the indigenous groups, farming, hunting and cash-cropping. Other Ladinos in the valley are more recent immigrants who came in search of open land to farm and raise cattle. The center of the Ladino region, "Sico," has a striking frontier town appearance, aligned with the national culture's "vaquero" (cowboy) lifestyle and market economy. One vaquero in Sico rides the river on a jet ski. More commonly, they have four-wheel drive vehicles used during the dry season when the roads connect Sico to the north coast cities of Honduras.

The Río Plátano Miskito along the coast have limited interaction with this segment of the Ladino population. However, Ladino settlements extend into areas of historic Miskito villages along the Sico River. Recent feuds over land have occurred between long-term Miskito residents and more recently settled Ladinos working for ranchers and lumber companies along the Paulaya River. Conflicts in Chiquirito result in the Miskito and Ladinos living in separate neighborhoods and the Miskito fear their encroaching and armed neighbors.

The new and larger segment of Ladinos enter into the Plátano Biosphere from the southwest as part of an active colonization front. Ladinos enter the reserve cutting roads, clearing forests and establishing cattle ranches. Here Ladinos threaten to assimilate remnant Pech families surviving in two communities. Ladinos, in general, are known for exploiting reserve resources and their actions in the southern zone threaten the entire reserve.

Ladinos are called "Ispael" in Miskito, "Bula" in Garifuna, "Muladu" in Pech, and "Indio" in Spanish. Although "Indio" is a derogatory term, it is often used by Ladinos to refer to themselves. Many Ladinos said to me: "We speak Spanish, we are the Indios (Ladinos) of Moskitia." However, in formal contexts the mestizos call themselves "Ladinos." To the indigenous groups in the biosphere, "Indios" are the enemy--the hegemonic and oppressive, Spanish-speaking national culture.

All of the reserve's culture groups call Spanish-speakers "Indios" when speaking Spanish in informal contexts. Using the term "Indio" degrades the Ladinos by calling attention away from their European ancestors--the Spanish-- and focusing on their less prestigious, Indian ancestry. Indigenous groups ethnicize the Ladinos by calling forth their Indian ancestry when referring to them as "Indios." Because the Miskito call the Ladinos by the term "Indio," referring to their Amerindian heritage which the Miskito also have, they seem too be trying again to distance themselves from the Amerindian heritage and ancestry that they also have. This seems to be another interesting reversal of identity that characterizes Miskito inter-ethnic relations in the reserve.

	Recipient Miskito	**Pech**	**Garífuna**	**Ladino**	**Creole**	**Isleño**
Referent Miskito	Miskito	Paya	Karibi	Ispael	Kriol	Musti
Pech	Kumaja	Pech	Karabe	Bula	Tersu	Turucawa
Garífuna	Idudu	Fayana	Garífuna	Muladu	Guiou	Wadabu
Ladino	Sambo	Paya	Moreno	Ladino	Negro	Caracol
Creole	Miskito	Paya	Carib	Spanish	Creole	English
Isleño	Miskito	Paya	Carib	Spanish	Creole	English

Table 5.2 Broad Spectrum of Ethnic Labels

My results (Table 5.2) show that each linguistic group has its own set of terms to refer to Others (look horizontally). Each individual group is also called by a variety of terms (look vertically). The Miskito, for example, are called "Indians" by English-speakers and "Sambos" by the Spanish-speakers. Variations in the use of terms of reference demonstrate inter-ethnic relations and the broader system of identity in the reserve. We see that the socio-racial categories vary depending on who the referent is. For example, English-speakers (look horizontally to Creole/Isleño) use more culturally oriented ethnic terms, "Miskito," "Carib," "Spanish," "Creole," or "English," but Spanish-speakers (look horizontally to Ladino) refer to the racial

ancestry of groups, calling the Miskito, Garifuna, and Creoles "Sambo," "Moreno," and "Negro." Blacks, in the Spanish colonial world, were positioned at the bottom of the social hierarchy, below the Indians, who were considered to be in the process of "mestizaje" or miscegenation and cultural mixing between Indians and Europeans (Stutzman 1981; Williams 1991). Helms (1977) claims that the Spaniards tried to subjugate others by using racial slurs that emphasize their non-prestigious ancestry. Therefore, the use of particular terms of reference implies higher or lower perceived status between the groups and displays inter-ethnic relations and the reserve.

High/Polite	Low/Derogatory
Miskito	Sambo
Pech	Paya
Garífuna	Moreno/Negro
Ladino	Indio
Inglés Negro	Negro
Isleño	Caracol

Table 5.3 Polite and Derogatory Spanish Terms of Reference

Although each group has its own set of ethnic terms when speaking in its own language, they all use the same respectful and derogatory terms when speaking in Spanish (Table 5.3). Ethnic terms of reference vary depending on either polite or

derogatory contexts of a conversation. The polite forms, "Miskito," "Pech," "Garífuna," "Ladino," "Creole," and "Isleño" are usually the terms that groups use to identify themselves when speaking in Spanish. Generally, the derogatory and impolite forms, "Sambo," "Paya," "Moreno," "Indio," "Negro," and "Caracol" are ascribed by others in informal Spanish discourse. These derogatory terms of reference (especially "Indio," "Sambo," "Moreno," and "Negro") refer to the group's least prestigious origins, such as the Indian ancestry of the Ladino, and the African ancestry of the Miskito, Garífuna, and Creoles.

The Miskito, Garífuna, and Creoles all have the common identity of Blacks in the diaspora because of their mixed ancestries.[3] However, they all use the terms "Sambo," "Moreno," and "Negro" to refer to each other in informal Spanish, calling forth and essentializing the African identity of the Other. These terms may be used in affectionate way by insiders, while it is considered a derogatory term when used by an outsider. Therefore, when a Miskito calls a Creole, "Negro," or a Garifuna calls a Miskito "Sambo," this seems to be a case of inverted identities, where those with Black ancestry try to distance themselves from their own Blackness by emphasizing it in the Other (See Cosminsky 1976; Cosminsky and Scrimshaw 1976; Cosminsky and Whipple 1984.)[4]

Social scientists, if not the Latin American citizenry in general, consider the categories of "Ladino" and "Indio" as structurally opposed (Hawkins 1983, 1988; Warren 1978, 1992; Watanabe 1989, 1990). "Ladinos" are the Spanish-speaking

"hybrid" or mestizo population that has more socio-economic power than the "Indios"; "Indios" are the lower class or sub-altern peoples with their own cultures, languages, and "pure" ancestry. "Ladinos" and "Indios," then, are inverse images where their meaning arises out of contrast with the Other (Saussure 1959).

Revealing the Honduran Moskitia's unique ethnic constellation shows that the reserve has it's own system of identity (Table 5.2 and 5.3) with folk definitions that differ from the Honduran national and social scientific, Spanish-speaking communities. Most significantly, my research shows that the indigenous Miskito, Tawahka, and Pech do not refer to themselves, nor are they referred to by others, as "Indios" when speaking in Spanish. In informal Spanish, the indigenous groups all refer to individuals from the Spanish-speaking national population as "Indios" (Friedlander 1975; Gonzalez 1988). Individuals from the Spanish-speaking national population, then, are called both "Ladinos" and "Indios" depending on the context. Therefore, my research documents a socio-linguistic anomaly[5]--the term "Indio" is not used to refer to the Indian population as elsewhere in Latin America. In the next paragraph I attempt to explain why this has occurred in Moskitia.

While geo-politically part of Latin America, Moskitia is also part of the Circum-Caribbean culture area that remained largely outside of Spanish colonial and post-colonial cultural influences, first as a British Protectorate and then as a resource area exploited by foreign companies (Adams 1956, 1957; Augelli 1962; Floyd 1967; Helms 1975, 1976b; Holm 1978; MacLeod 1973; Naylor 1989; Newson 1986;

Nietschmann 1979; Parsons 1954; Steward 1946, 1948; West and Augelli 1989). The British greatly influenced Miskito culture and language, even at the level of their kinship terms. The Miskito were British subjects during the colonial era when the Indio/Ladino social identities and socio-linguistic categories developed elsewhere in Spanish America. Due to prolonged British influence, the Indio/Ladino identity dialectic may never have fully developed in Moskitia. My research shows that the identity system in the RPBR draws from both Latin American and British Caribbean societies, to create a unique ethnic landscape. However, my research does show that Indigenous-mestizo conflicts over land, culture, and language persist within the context of the Honduran state.

Social Status Hierarchy

In the previous section I documented ethnic terms of reference, stereotypes, and recorded language choice in context. This revealed the various situational uses of identity by the culture groups in Moskitia. In this section, I examine the social status hierarchy (from the Miskito perspective) and their preferred marriage partners. This illustrates the particular identities that Miskito individuals mobilize for economic and political gains. I recorded social status hierarchies from Miskito individuals during interviews, asking individuals to rank all culture groups in the reserve from higher to lower in social prestige.

Meriki (Anglos)
Musti (Islander/Isleño)
Kriol (Creole)
Miskito (Miskito)
Paya (Pech)
Sumu (Tawahka)
Karibi (Garífuna)
Ispael (Ladino)

Table 5.4 The Miskito View of the Social Hierarchy

Low Status Ranking

For a Miskito person, the most determining criterion for assigning a low status ranking to a culture group was if they had a disregard for human life. Most of the Miskito interviewed said that both the Garífuna and Ladinos were "upla ikisa" (murderers) and "huba setan" evil people. They claimed that Ladinos kill with guns and machetes, while the Garífuna use "mana negra" (black magic). The Miskito called these types of people "kupia siksa" (black-hearted), "min" (mean), or "upla saura" (bad people) and believed that they should be avoided at all times.

Miskito individuals ranked groups low in the hierarchy and categorized them as "upla saura" (bad people) if they were known to harm others with "sika saura" (evil

potions), to be "slabla" (stingy), or to be "upla wal aisaia apia" (snobbish and egotistical). Most Miskitos interviewed consistently claimed that the Tawahka and Creole peoples used sika saura. Many Miskito especially feared Tawahka Sumu sika because no local counteractive remedies exist on the north coast, far from the Tawahka homeland where the potions were made. While the Miskito also knew powerful sika, they claim to mainly dabble in good sika or love potions. Many Miskito individuals also stated that the Pech, Ladino, and Garífuna peoples were slabla, and that the Pech and Ladino peoples were snobbish and egotistical because they preferred not to talk to, interact with, or marry the Miskito people. The Miskito ranked the Ladinos and the Pech low in the social status hierarchy because they were both stingy and egotistical, not wanting to marry Miskito people. The Miskito categorized the Garífuna, Pech, and Tawahka as upla saura. They also categorized Creoles as both good and bad, depending on the individual. Therefore, the only groups that were not considered upla saura were the Merikis (North Americans), Isleños, and the Miskito.

	Meriki	Musti	Kriol	Miskito	Sumu	Paya	Ispael	Karibi
Types of People								
Good	+	+	+	+				
Bad			+		+	+	+	+
Types of Bad People								
Stingy						+	+	+
Murderers							+	+
Black Magic or sika saura					+	+		+
Snobbish						+	+	

Table 5.5 The Miskito View of Ethnic Others as Good and Bad People

Anglo Affinity and Ladino and Garifuna Aversion

The Miskito view of social status (Table 5.4) displays the Anglo affinity and mestizo aversion duality along the coast. Most often, local Miskito people ranked English-speakers and North Americans, who they call "Meriki" or "Gringo," as the highest, and the Garifuna and the Ladinos as the lowest. Charles Hale (1994) describes the Miskito as having an "Anglo affinity" because they seem to have a natural or immediate inclination toward English-speakers and North Americans. My

work shows that the Miskito ranked the Merikis, Isleños, Creoles, and themselves in the four highest statuses. This ranking also represents how the Miskito perceive which groups have the most British ancestry and cultural features.

Many Miskito individuals told me of their historic ties to European cultures and economies and readily claim their people's ancestry as being part British. When interacting with "Merikis," the Miskito even project a kinship with them based on the historic alliance with the British during the colonial era. One Miskito man said to me in English with a strong Caribbean accent: "I'm an Englishman, like you." He not only claimed British ancestry and heritage, but went on to claim that as a Miskito, he should be a recognized citizen of the United Kingdom. Trying to make his point, he added, "Queen Elizabeth is my real President, not President Reina" (who was President of Honduras at the time).

Some Miskito men who travel across the Caribbean as lobster divers thrive on learning English words and phrases. A popular slang expression among Miskito divers mixes English and Spanish: "Si, Man" (yes). "Si" is Spanish, and "man" is English. Like Anglo wannabes, Miskito individuals also enthusiastically point out the many English words in the Miskito vocabulary when talking to North Americans. While the Miskito value English culture, at the same time, they dislike mestizo culture and those with Spanish heritage. Thus, the Miskito have a love-hate duality, loving anglo culture and individuals with North American and British descent and hating national culture and those of Spanish ancestry. This love-hate duality is the

basis for the social hierarchy where Merikis or Gringos (the closest thing to an Englishmen on the coast today) are perceived as the highest social status and "Ispael" or Ladino as the lowest.

Most Ladinos who live along the reserve's north coast during the 1990s were merchants. They expressed their higher social class, compared to the Miskito peoples, by only marrying other Ladinos. Many Ladinos speak Spanish only and refuse to learn the Miskito language. A few Ladino merchants, who had lived in Moskitia for more than ten years, even pretended not to understand the Miskito language when attending to customers in their stores. From the Ladino perspective, the Miskito were brutish people whom they called "Sambos."

Today, the Miskito distrust and hate the Spanish-speaking Ladinos. When speaking in their own language, Miskito people derogatorily refer to the "Ladino" individuals and their Spanish language as "Ispael." Miskito perceive that the Ispaels have no respect for other human beings or the environment--they kill people and destroy their lands. They often say, "Ispael usus pata" (or "Ispael Aras Pata" in Nicaragua), literally meaning "Ladinos are food for the vultures." This expression comes from the Miskito claim that Ladinos commonly kill each other and leave each other's bodies to rot in the monte, eventually to be eaten by vultures. The Miskito dehumanize the Ladinos by claiming they even kill their own. Another common ethnic slur that the Miskito use to refer to a Ladino is the term "Ispayul," combining the term "Ispael" or Ladino with "yul" (dog), invoking their sub-human qualities.

The Miskito stereotyped all Ladino men as being cattle-raising cowboys, who carry guns, ride horses, and never bathe (they were gun-slinging murderers), despite the fact that most in the area are more involved in agriculture then with cattle ranching. The Miskito even claim Ladinos all "smell like horses." Miskito women stereotype Ladina women as submissive and lazy, suggesting, "they sit around the house flipping tortillas all day." In contrast, the Miskito stereotype themselves as travelling by foot and canoe, as not having guns, and as bathing in lagoons and the sea at least twice a day. They see themselves characterized by women working their own agricultural fields, heading households, and going out in all female groups to socialize or "kirbaia" (to stroll). The gender-power complex in the Ladino "machismo" culture contrasted sharply with the Miskito vision of a matrifocal culture, where women had more personal freedoms and a higher level of female autonomy. Lewis (2000:905) also found that black Mexican women ("morenas") were thought of as being tough and strong-willed by "mestizos."

The RPBR Miskito people largely define themselves by their two biggest enemies--the "Karibi" (Garífuna) and "Ispael" (Ladino). While the Miskito dislike the Garífuna because of what they perceived as their Africanized appearance and different way of speaking, they hate the Ladinos' cowboy culture even more. Both of these groups have had historic conflicts with the Miskito. The Miskito Coast was the only area not controlled by the Spanish along the Central American Caribbean shore during the colonial era. This was mostly due to the presence of the bellicose Zambos-

Mosquitos who became allies with the British and helped them fight the Spanish to the west. The Miskito and Garífuna at times fought against each other as tools of the English and Spanish. The Garífuna joined forces with the Spanish to fight against the Miskito and British allied forces in the early 1800s (MacLeod 1973; Naylor 1989; West and Augelli 1989). Conflictive and rival relations still exist between the Garifuna and Miskito. Interactions between Garifuna and Miskito are often shrouded in accusations of witchcraft and both groups fear the other and have a mutual distrust. Although some Miskito are even darker skinned than many Garífuna, the Miskito deride the Garífuna's more African or Black physical appearance. The Miskito also mock what they call the Garífuna's "African" dance (the punta), "unintelligible language," and "loud way of talking."

The Miskito often stereotype Garífuna men negatively and say, "they are lazy Blacks who sit around and eat cassava all day." Many Miskito individuals also resent the Garífuna for their greater participation in national culture, including the fact that many local teachers are Garífuna who generally speak Spanish better than the Miskito. Conversely, the Garífuna view the Miskito as a group of mixed Blacks and Indians who were less modernized and educated than themselves. The Miskito produce contradictory stereotypes about the Garífuna, claiming that the Garífuna are lazy Blacks and also that they have better jobs than the Miskito people. Lewis (2000) found these same contradictory stereotypes about Blacks produced by the Indian and mestizo populations of Costa Chica, Mexico. Here, she showed the "morenos" (Black

residents of San Nicolás Tolentino) had a higher socio-economic status than the nearby Indians, yet the "morenos" were called lazy and poor businessmen, while the Indians were thought of as hardworking. Lewis (2000:905) concludes that these stereotypes parallel colonial and national ideologies that "repudiate blackness while idealizing Indianness." The Miskito similarly have adopted colonial ideologies regarding Blackness and Indianness, and project representations of Blackness on the Garífuna and, in this case, Indianness on themselves.

Preferred Marriage Partners

I also asked women in Kuri, "who would you most like to marry and why?" While their answers mostly corresponded to the social status hierarchy, differences did occur. Remarkably, although the Miskito hated the Ladino culture group as a whole, Miskito women considered marrying a Ladino desirable. As a result, Ladino men were ranked higher as marriage partners than the group was ranked as a whole.

Miskito women claim the two most important factors in choosing a spouse is skin color and economic status. They claim Ladino men make good husbands because they were "lala brisa" (to have lots of money) and had lighter skin. Thus, out of the two most hated groups, the Ladinos and Garífuna, a Miskito woman much prefer to marry a Ladino man to provide high social class signifiers of her off-spring.

Most women claimed undesirable marriage partners had "taya siksa" (black skin) and were "umpira" or "lala apu" (without money). For the Miskito, then, the

Garífuna were off limits to marry for both of these reasons--they were both black skinned and poor. A young woman in Kuri was even kicked off of her matrigroup's land and largely disinherited for having a Garífuna man's child. The Miskito people did, however, marry Creoles--who were considered siksa or black-skinned--because they had a high socio-economic position. Their high status results from the post-colonial era when English-speaking Creoles worked as managers in North American fruit and lumber companies. Today, locals still consider Creoles wealthier than the Miskito, Pech, or Garífuna, although this is not always the case.

Although Creoles sometimes have darker skin than the Garífuna, the Miskito see the Creoles as being more distanced from an African identity. The Miskito respect and admire the Creoles because they were historic allies of the British and are seen as being more culturally European. Most significantly, they speak English. Miskito women who marry Creole men, then, gain in social and economic status, but must pass on potentially darker skin to their off-spring (see also Lancaster 1991).

The next chart (Table 5.6) explores the three most important criteria that Miskito women use for choosing a spouse. These criterion are the color of one's skin, one's wealth, and whether or not one is a good person. The ethnic groups names presented horizontally are categorized with "+s" to demonstrate their desirable qualities to Miskito women. Those categorized with "(+)s" signify that some of this ethnic group have these qualities.

	Meriki	Musti	Kriol	Miskito	Sumu	Paya	Ispael	Karibi
Skin Color								
Light	+	+		(+)			+	
Wealth								
rich	+	+	+	(+)			+	
Type of Person								
good		+	+	+	+			

Table 5.6 Miskito Women's Criteria for Desirable Marriage Partners

Miskito women claim that the Miskito men are good to marry because most were "kupia pihini" or good-hearted, some had lots of money, and a few even had white skin or taya pihini. However, they did complain about individual Miskito men, claiming that they stole, lied, cursed, and drank too much. Women also said that men are jealous and that they beat their wives when they were drunk. The following is a list of complaints that Miskito women had about their Miskito husbands: they "rum disa " (drink rum), "kus aisisa" (curse), "huba kunin/turi aisisa" (lie and gossip excessively), "implikisa" (steals), "wanina" (jealous), "maia prukaia" (yelled at or hit their wives). However, at the end of the day, Miskito women classified Miskito men

as good husbands and "kupia pihini"(good people). Literally this term means white (pihini) heart (kupia). The color white is often associated with goodness and generosity in Miskito culture.

Discussion

Based on data from participant observation, interviews, and questionnaires with individuals from each ethnic group in Moskitia, I examined the ethnic labels and the insiders assumptions--such as language, behavior, and skin color--that individuals used to distinguish between themselves and others in their pluri-ethnic homeland. Thus, this data shows not only how the Miskito view themselves, but also how they are seen by Others. My point of departure is the theoretical perspective of social interactionism, whereby individuals construct their self identities during social interactions, thus defining him or herself in relation to Others. Because the self is objectified during social interactions, the self takes on attributes that the Other attributes to him.

Social constructivism stresses the idea of identities being situational and contextual (Mead 1964) and that the individual's total social identity is made up of their various situational uses of identity. And just as the various identities formed during interactions with Other form the totality of one's social identity, the same is true of the group. The Miskito's many situational identities formed at this regional level are part of their group's ethnic or total social identity. I see Miskito ethnic

identity at the regional level as the sum total of how Garifuna, Pech, Tawahka, Ladino, Creole, and Isleños view them and how they view themselves when interacting with these groups.

Chapter five fulfills one of my research objectives by showing that Miskito individuals construct situational identities, manipulating cultural markers of identification, when interacting with local, regional, national and international Others. Using a social interactionist approach allows me to see how Miskito individuals construct various identities during interactions with others. Thus, their identity is constructed differently with each of the other ethnic groups. Ethnic labels showing the Miskito to be called Wayah, Miskito Indian, Sambo, Kumaja, Idudu, etc. demonstrate this in part. However, ethnic terms are not completely representative of the full spectrum of Miskito identities. Theoretically speaking, the Miskito have different identities when interacting with each group in the reserve. Yet, some groups use the same term to refer to the Miskito in discourse, especially when speaking in Spanish. This veils the unique construction of Miskito identity that occurs during interactions with these diverse Others.

Most significantly, Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve Miskito individuals construct situational socio-racial and ethnic identities when referring to themselves and when being referred to as Sambos, stressing their Black identity, and at other times when calling themselves and when being called Indians, stressing their native Amerindian status. The situational use of identity at the regional level may allow for

these constructions at the broader level. Indeed, the Honduran Miskito are also learning to represent themselves as Blacks and Indians in the global discourses of conservation and protected areas. The next chapter, working backwards in scale, takes us from the regional reserve to the local village level to examine how Miskito identity is constructed, negotiated, and maintained in Kuri.

Notes to Chapter Five

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1. A few Garífuna villages are located in Nicaragua, however, the Garífuna language has been lost there.

2. Many scholars have theorized about the origin of the ethnic label "Miskito" because it does not seem to have aboriginal origins. Columbus and other early explorers call the Indians living at Cape Gracias by the names, "Indios de Cabo Gracias a Dios," or "Cape Indians." Not until early seventeenth century did residents, pirates, and buccaneers called them "Musquette," "Moskite," "Moskito," and "Moskito-men" in English, and "Moustique" and "Moustiquais" in French (Conzemius (1932:13). Other spellings occur in the earliest literature, such as "Mosqueto," "Mosquito," "Mosco," and "Musketo" (Lehmann 1920:465). George Heath (1913:51) believes the term Miskito may have come from the Spanish phrase, "Indios Mixtos," referring to the Miskito's mixed ancestry. However, Charles Gibson told Mary Helms (1971:16) that the term "Mosqueto" derives from the word "musket," which the pirates began calling their native friends because this type of firearm was so important in their daily life. Mary Helms thinks Gibson's explanation is plausible because "Musquette," "Mosqueto," " and " Mustique"correlate to the English, Spanish, and French versions of the word musket--musket, mosquete, and moustiquet (Helms 1971:16).

Edward Conzemius (1932:1) suggests that the name may have first belonged to the Central American rainforest region, La Mosquitia (in Honduras) or the Mosquito Coast (in Nicaragua), or the nearby Mosquito Keys. Thus, by extension, the inhabitants were called the same term. This would pinpoint the exact origin of the term Miskito to when the British first arrived and named the Mosquito Coast. The Spanish had originally called the region Cartago, and then, later, called by two terms, Tologalpa (the Nicaraguan sector) and Taguzgalpa (the Honduran shore). Conzemius (1932:1) also suggested that the British chose the name Mosquito because of the

plethora of insects in the region. William Davidson (1993, personal communication) recently found maps from the 1500s that show Islands off the coast of Nicaragua called the Islas Mosquitos. Whether the term Miskito derives originally from the word "mixtos," a gun, a region, or an insect, most scholars concur that their name was applied to them by outsiders because they called themselves Waikna--meaning person, human being, or man-- in their own Miskito language.

3. Gilroy (1991), Hall (1990), and Tawadros (1989) see commonalities between Blacks in the diaspora as being based on their similar and inter-connected histories (as migrants, subjects of racism, and slaves) rather than essentializing and racializing their identities as Blacks.

4. Culture groups trying to separate themselves from their Blackness while emphasizing it in the Other was found in Belize during the 70's and 80's. Cosminsky and Whipple (1984:119-124, 130; Cosminsky and Scrimshaw 1976:96-105) showed that the English-speakers, more Europeanized Creoles see the Garífuna as being blacker (physically darker) than themselves because of the Garífuna's African and indigenous cultural characteristics. In a related study, Cosminsky and Scrimshaw's (1976) consider the conflict and/or cooperation between the more powerful Creoles and the Garífuna. Creoles are native born English-speakers who try to associate themselves with their European ancestry and downplay their "Africanness." Because the Garífuna have what Creoles tried to downplay about their ancestry--African roots--the Creoles tried to distance themselves from the Garífuna. Creoles emphasized the "Africanness" of the Garífuna while simultaneously stressing their own English heritage. Conversely, the Garífuna tried to elevate their status by emphasizing the Creoles' Negro heritage while stressing their own Carib Indian ancestry, who some even claim were white-skinned (Cosminsky and Whipple 1984:118-124; Cosminsky and Scrimshaw 1976:95-112). In sum, "The Creole emphasized that he is "the son of the Baymen," and the Carib tends to emphasize his Carib Indian (which some say is white) rather than his African ancestry" (Cosminsky and Scrimshaw 1976:104). Today, however, the Garífuna are shifting their alliances and have more fully embraced their identities as Blacks in the Americas (England 1996).

5. Many important identity studies in Mesoamerica societies have focused on the Ladino-Indio identity duality (Adams 1956, 1970; Colby and Van den Berghe 1969; de la Fuente 1952; Gillin 1952; Nash 1957, 1958; Redfield and Tax 1952; Tumin 1952; Wolf 1955).

Chapter Six: Female Autonomy

My research is the first to document matrilocal residential patterns and male absenteeism among the Miskito in a modern-day setting. These patterns of matrilocality and male absenteeism are important for historians and anthropologists to understand. They parallel historic Miskito social organization and are largely responsible for how the success of the Miskito population and their strong identity over the last four hundred years. As was described in the culture history section in chapter two, the colonial Miskito expanded along the coast by passing down Miskito identity while living in matrilocal groups while the men were away. My case study of Kuri details patterns of social organization similar to those reported in the ethno-historic literature.

Historic Miskito Social Organization

Early ethnographic and explorer's accounts report that men worked away from the villages and that related women lived near each other to raise their children (Bell 1862, 1899; Conzemius 1932:147; and Helms 1971:25). Bell (1862, 1899:85-86) who was raised on the Honduran coast in the mid 1800s, described a Miskito village composed of women and children where men were away cutting mahogany:

> In January, at the commencement of the dry season, the Mosquito men of the coast fell and burn off their small plantations, and, leaving the women behind, take their departure for the turtle fishery, or to engage in the mahogany works. By the end of May they begin to languish for their wives and children, and turn their canoes homeward.
>
> The women lead a sort of picnic life while their men are absent. They stray away in parties to visit their neighbors at the mouths of adjacent rivers, camp out in the bush gathering oil seeds, wander for days among the mangroves catching blue crabs, or go to some distant lagoon to feed on cockles and oysters. Generally they devote a month to camping on the beach, where they keep an immense pot boiling night and day, making salt from sea-water, and they are generally living on the beach when the men are expected to return. Then, every sail that appears on the horizon is anxiously watched by troops of little brown children, and women with children on their back rush out of the houses whenever there is a cry of a canoe approaching.

This historic Miskito social organization of matrilocality and male absenteeism is directly related to their involvement with "boom and bust" economies along the coast (Helms 1969b, 1970, 1971). Anthropologist Mary Helms (1971:29) first characterized the Miskito "boom and bust" economy, where a productive period is followed by a non-productive one. Helms (1971:23) postulated that during "bust" times, when industries left the region, Miskito men returned to their agricultural work, and families lived in patrilocal groups: during "boom" times, women lived in matrilocal groups and the men were gone working as laborers for foreign companies.

Helms (1971:24-25) discussed why matrilocality was well adapted to migrant wage labor:

> Matrilocality...does provide a core of related women whose consanguinity helps to tie separate nuclear families together into larger, more viable units, even if husband-fathers are absent, or, as also frequently happened among the Miskito, if husband-fathers are of non-Miskito background. Furthermore, a basis is provided for the continued local expression of traditional forms of kinship, generosity, and general culture patterns.

Other ethno-historians support Helm's belief that matrilocal organization and male absenteeism characterized Miskito society from the 17th through the 19th century, but no study has detailed it in a modern-day setting until now. Even Helm's classic 1971 study of Asang, a community in Nicaragua on the Río Coco, was completed in a patrilocally organized village, where men were present on a daily basis. My work shows for the first time in a live situation that RPBR Miskito villages are characterized by matrilocal residence patterns and male absenteeism, similar to the historic Miskito.

Matrilocal Residence and Male Absenteeism

The Miskito community of Kuri, established in 1915, had 22 houses and 122 residents during my research in the dry season (verano or summer) of 1991. When I returned in 1997, the village had grown to 25 houses and 175. The data presented in

the two tables below reveal the number of people claiming to be permanent residents in Kuri households. Viewing the population by sex shows that a little more than half of the population in Kuri is female (Table 6.1). These data disguise one of the main characteristics of village organization—men are absent from daily life. Viewing the population by age shows that more than half of the population is under 12 years of age (Table 6.2). Kuri is mainly composed of women and children.

Total Population	175
Males	79
Females	96

Table 6.1 Population by Sex, 1998

Age	Sex		Total
	M	F	175
5 and under	20	29	49
6 to 12	24	18	42
13 to 25	17	26	43
26 to 39	8	12	20
40 to 55	7	7	14
56 to	3	4	7

Table 6.2 Population by Age and Sex, 1998

During most of my 1997-98 field season, 31/35 males over the age of 12 claimed permanent residence in Kuri households were absent from the village on a daily basis (Table 6.3). Of these 31 males, 22 were absent from the villages while working in the lobster industry (see chapter seven). During the lobster season, from August to March, young and older men leave for two weeks at a time, coming home to rest for a few days before shipping off again. Indeed, women treated the lobster divers like visitors when present in the village. When not off shore diving for lobsters, the men are also absent from coastal villages because they work away in

subsistence labors. They live semi-permanently in up-river agricultural and hunting camps where they farm, fish, and hunt wild game. These camps up the Plátano River are located a long distance from the coastal villages.

Age	Sex		Total
	M	F	141
5 and under	20	29	49
6 to 12	24	18	42
13 to 25	0	26	26
26 to 39	0	12	12
40 to 55	3	7	10
56 to	1	4	5

Table 6.3 Actual Population in Residence by Age and Sex, 1998

Young men begin leaving the village to work in both agricultural and lobstering activities around the age of 12 or 13, after they finish elementary school. They continue to alternate back and forth between wage-earning and subsistence

labors for most of their lives. Adult men are also absent from daily life in coastal villages because of the high rate of divorce and desertion (as later discussed in the section, "Serial Monogamy"). Male absenteeism due to both migrant and subsistence labors and high rates of divorce and desertion largely renders coastal villages the women and children's domain.

Kuri has predominantly matrilocal residential patterns; it is geographically divided into five matrilocal groups composed of members related through the female line. These five female-centered residential groups accounted for 82% (in 18/22 houses) of the total population in 1991 and 89% (in 22/25 houses) by 1998. Two (of the three) neolocal households in 1997-98 were occupied by pastors and their families who worked in the nearby Evangelical Pentecostal and Catholic churches.[1] The other neolocal home was occupied by a woman who resided here in 1991, but had since remarried. Kuri, then has become increasingly matrilocal in the 1990s. Even in the four cases of marriages that have occurred between young men and women within the village, data show these couples living near the wife's family.

A Miskito song, performed by two men (W. Suarez and E. Guevarra) from Kuri, reveals the cultural assumption they operate by regarding post-marital residence:

Taihka, Taihka, Tahti, Tahti/Aunti, Aunti, Uncle, Uncle

Aunti, Aunti, Aunti, Uncle, Uncle Uncle,
I want your daughter to be mine
I will buy her a chicken, her pig and
build her a house close to your house
Aunti, Aunti, Aunti, I want your daughter to be mine
I will give her pigs and I will give her dogs
I will give her a house close to your house

The title of the song is curious. "Taihka" (boy's father's sister) and "Tahti" (boy's mother's brother) are the terms the singer uses to refer to his future in-laws. The young man is probably using Taihka and Tahti as terms of respect or they are extended kinship terms because the Miskito do not normally marry first cousins. The young man sings about wanting to marry a young woman. He tells her parents, "I will build the girl's house close to yours." The young man is reassuring them, during his marriage proposal, that he will not take her away to live somewhere else.

The most binding ties in Kuri develop between local matrilineally related women, with the closest bonds between mothers, daughters, and sisters who remain together through out their lives. These ties create the most enduring social and economic support networks in Miskito society. The strong sense of solidarity between members of a matrilocal group also expresses itself through spatial territoriality that exists between each compound. The presence of both natural and man-made boundaries--such as orchard gardens, yuca fields, lagoons, and fences--that

separate matri-compounds from each other. Each family territory forms a separate neighborhood or "barrio" with its own name.

Coastal residential compounds revolve around the central house and patio of the Kuka, the powerful grandmother figure, village elder, land owner, and head of the matrilocal compound. The Kuka's household is surrounded by her daughter's homes, and these sisters trace their heritage and status back to her. With paths between households, related women visit each other daily and individual households of the matrigroup functioned like rooms of one greater house, bound together by a well in the center. The well serves as the central social station where related women and children held court, gossiped and joked with each other throughout the day while washing clothes, bathing, and hauling water.

Women of the matrigroup all share in the work of raising their children. Matrilineally related cousins are raised as siblings. Indeed, Miskito kinship terminology corresponds to these patterns, whereby cousins, brothers, and sisters are all called by the same terms, "muihki" (same sex, same generation) and "lakra" (different sex, same generation). Because cousins are raised together like siblings, many play the role of mother to a child, including his or her grandmother, many maternal aunts, older sisters, and female cousins. Often children are given to their grandmothers who adopt the child and take over as primary care giver. Thus, a child may call many women "mama" throughout their life.

Female solidarity and autonomy between related women is only heightened by the absence of men. Not only do the women make daily household economic and child-rearing decisions, but they maintain an economy based on reciprocity between kin and worked together caring for their common resources. They till the coastal yuca field, cleaned the well, and unloaded commercial merchandise that arrived twice a month by boat. During times of most intense labor-oriented activities, such as just before Easter weekend, the entire matrigroup (around forty people), including all women, children, and beached lobster divers, travel up-river to live and work communally in agricultural camps or champas. Families' agricultural and hunting camps are called "kiamps" in Miskito and "champas" in Spanish. The Miskito use the term "kiamp" in their language to refer to these agricultural camps, however, this term has been used in the ethnographic literature to refer to a Miskito kinship group. Because I discuss the kinship group called kiamp later in this chapter, I have chosen to refer to agricultural and hunting camps as champas to avoid confusion.

Matrilocal groups in Kuri are associated with champas (family agricultural camps) where groups of relatives worked and lived for much of the year (Table 6.4).

Matrilocal Groups	Champas
Kuka Denecela	Liwa Raya
Kuka Lyvian	Liwa Raya
Kuka Berihilda	Liwa Raya and Sihibila
Deceased Kuka	Piu-Piu
Kuka Gladys	Chile and Triste[2]

Table 6.4 Matrilocal Groups and their Champas

Matrilocality and male absenteeism are features in Kuri social organization that correspond to historic Miskito patterns of social structure. These features also contribute to a broader group of matrifocal characteristics in Miskito villages. What follows are other features of Kuri village organization, that along with matrilocality and male absenteeism, create the matrifocal society and the high level of female autonomy there for women. The rest of this section details other matrifocal characteristics of Miskito village organization.

Mother-Centeredness

Motherhood and having many children are both highly valued in Miskito society because they are directly related to the proliferation of the Miskito as a population group. Helms (1971, 1976a) and (1996a, 1996b, 1997) both describe the

important roles women play in the maintenance and transmission of Miskito sharing networks and social identities to the younger generations. Garcia (1996b:14) explains in her article "Qué Implica Ser Mujer y Ser Madre en Asang, Río Coco" (What It Means to Be a Woman and Mother in Asang") that Miskito women have a high level of power that results from the traditional roles they play as mothers and as creators of ties between domestic units. Garcia (1996b:22) contends: "the empirical data seems to confirm that the cultural continuity of the Miskito society results from the ties of female solidarity that exist, centered in the role of the mother."[3] Soon after having a child, married women usually build their own houses and become the household head. This ties a young woman into social networks with other women in the matrigroup.

A mother's main responsibility is keeping her children healthy. Because of the threat of many tropical and other diseases, the lack of hospitals in the region, and the high rates of infant and early childhood mortality, keeping one's children healthy is serious and unrelenting work. Women of the matrigroup interact and share information constantly in their role as health-care givers. Together, they diagnose, cure, and care for their children's everyday illnesses and those caused by more supernatural forces. Especially with the men away, women of the matrigroup tie into health-care networks. Mothers teach their daughters traditional knowledge surrounding plant-based remedies when a child becomes sick. Those women known for their healing skills and knowledge of herbal medicines access power within and beyond the matrigroup.

The following data represents a complete village survey—I interviewed all women age 16 and above. The data show all women over the age of 20 that are mothers (Table 6.5). Only one woman in Kuri could not conceive and she has adopted children. Of the 10 younger women in the village age 16-19, half of them have had children already. Young girls are socialized to become mothers at an early age, usually around ten, when many are given responsibility for taking care of a specific baby or toddler (who, thereafter, is referred to as their "child.") The girls do everything except breast-feeding, bringing the child to the mother throughout the day. The girls sleep with their children, take them along fishing, fruit collecting, clothes washing, and going to the store, and play with them on the beach. Groups of young girls often can be seen along the sand dunes, rocking their babies to sleep in small hammocks between trees. During the hours a girl attends school, her child-care duties are suspended. Many days, however, mothers run errands and girls stay home from school. By the time a girl is 13 or 14, she is usually finished school and working in her mother's kitchen, supervising various younger siblings. Within a few years, she will give birth, passing through the most important rite of passage—motherhood.

A young woman gains status and power in the community with the birth of each new child. Children are thought of as economic resources within the matrigroup. Female children help with cooking and other domestic chores. Boys work the fields and eventually earn money doing wage labor. Society defines a good child as one who respects, helps, and is loyal to her mother and family. It is no wonder, then, that

having a lot of children is considered a form of wealth. The following is a verse of a song called "Arelita Mairin." These lyrics reveal how children are valued economically:

> the father of the men are millionaires
> the mothers of the men are millionaires
> the mothers of the women are millionaires
> the parents of the children are millionaires

Data reveals that women aged 40 and up had an average of 5.9 children; women between the ages of 26-29 had an average of 6 children; and those between the ages of 16 and 25, had an average of 1.73 children (Table 6.5). These figures are based only on the women's children that are alive today. Of the 38 women interviewed, they gave birth 172 times and had 146 total children living--16 women had children that died, 23 were infants or young children and 3 were adults (Table 6.6). Most children that die do so in the first year of life. Other children die as adults while lobster-diving or from illness. These figures do not include children that died in utero or through miscarriage.

Age	# Births	# Children alive	# Children died
69	11	11	
69	11	7	4
60	3	2	1
56	2	2	
55	8	7	1
50	10	8	2
49	1	1	
45	10	9	1
45	0		
44	5	4	1
40	8	8	
38	6	5	1
38	7	6	1
36	8	7	1
35	7	5	2
35	7	4	3
33	9	9	
32		5	
31	8	8	
30	7	7	
28	4	4	
27	4	4	
26	6	4	2
25	3	3	
24	4	4	
23	4	3	1
22	3	3	
21	4	2	2
19	1	1	
19	2	2	
18	2	1	1
18	1	0	1
18	0		
18	0		
17	0		
16	0		
16	1	0	1
16	0		

Table 6.5 Number of Women's Children

# Women	# Births	# of Children Dead	# Children Living
38	172	26	146

Table 6.6 Total Number of Women's Children.

Women over 25 have an average of about 6 children. While many women have many more children than this, others have fertility problems, which lowers the average number determined. In Dodds' (2001:96) study of 200 indigenous women in the Plátano Biosphere, he found that women had an average of 8 children. One factor lowering fertility rates among the younger women in Kuri is birth control. Young women and men increasingly use birth control that they mainly receive from clinics and local nurses. In analyzing the data above, it is also important to remember that most of the women considered are still having children. Women generally begin having children around the age of 18 and continue into their late 30s and early 40s.

Serial Monogamy

Monogamy may be the ideal marital union for the Miskito, but most adults have more than one spouse with whom they have children over a lifetime. Divorce and desertion were common occurrences and not only practiced by the young and immature. During my stay in Kuri, two relationships broke off between two of the kukas and their husbands, each with scores of children and grandchildren who tried to

get them to reconcile. Even though one man was nearly eighty years old, he was having an outside affair with another woman, causing Kuka Gladys to give him the boot. And the other, Kuka Lyvian, claimed she kicked her husband out for having sexual relations with the mermaid, the Miskito water goddess.

Locals distinguished between different types of marriages in Kuri, including church, legal, and common law marriages. Church and legal marriages are accorded higher social status than common law marriages.[4] Children from families with high social ranking usually have both church and legal marriages. Most marriages in Kuri are sanctioned by the local common law where couples that live together refer to each other as, "maia" (spouse). While common law marriages in the Honduran law is sanctioned after a more substantial time that couples live together, in Kuri, couples called each other maia as soon as the man moved into the woman's house.

The Kuka's marriage to her husband Octavio is a stand out after forty-five years together. She and Octavio were not wed in a church until Alcero, the youngest of her nine children, was sixteen. In more recent years, they have also legally registered their marriage. As Kuka Denecela told me, "those [women] who find a good one [man] are lucky, whether or not they get married in the church." Even though Kuka Denecela's marriage was by all accounts a success, both she and Octavio had other spouses and children from outside unions. Before they got together, Kuka Denecela had her eldest daughter during her first marriage to a Creole man, and

Octavio formerly had two other wives and families. One day, Kuka confided in me, "Octavio went up-river to work in Liwa-Raya and started to chase my muihki (the Miskito kinship term for sibling and female cousin of the same generation), Ritana, and they had several children, but it's over now." "The Kuka won," she said proudly about herself. When I asked her if she became enemies with her muihki Ritana because of this, Kuka laughed out loud. Some weeks later she explained:

> no man would ever break up muihki(s)...They [men] are all alike, fathers, brothers, and sons, what can you do? My own father had children all over the region. He even had children with my mothers' muihki muiki (full sister). At one time, my father lived in Kuri with both of them, and he alternated between houses. My father was worse than my husband [who kept his women in different villages]...he was another class ... a real jerk.

Most lobster divers marry by common law and have more than one wife and family. They live with one wife and family in a coastal village during the duration of the diving season, but then, return home during the veda to live with their other wives and children from the interior villages. Serial monogamy prevails. With little practice of birth control, women usually have children with various men. The data shows that 32 women in Kuri had 65 unions, which have produced children. The majority of women have children with two or more spouses (Table 6.7).[5]

# of women	# of spouses that produced children
13 women	1 spouse
6 women	2 spouses
6 women	3 spouses
4 women	4 spouses
3 women	5 spouses

Table 6.7 Number of Women's Marital Unions

These numbers are conservative because many of the women are young and are just beginning to have conjugal relationships and because I only recorded the husbands with who the women produced children (women had many more "husbands" with who they did not get pregnant). Some women also lie about their children's fathers to hide the fact that a child was born from an outside relationship. Information on male unions was harder to collect because the men did not raise their children. However, men generally had more marital unions than women throughout their life.[6]

A few versus from a well-known song reveals how Miskito men commonly have an outside girlfriend. The song (performed by W. Suarez and E. Guevara) jokes about how a man's girlfriend treats him better than his wife:

Maritkam Wihki Lilam Wal/Your Wife Or Your Lover

Your wife or your lover, which one do you want?
when you come in from "paseando" (going out)
your wife says where have you been burnt out old man?
you stink, get out of here,
you have a hole in your pocket
and kicks you in the head -- get out of here
your wife or your lover, which one do you want?

Your wife or your lover, which one do you want?
when you come home your wife asks you
where have you been old worn out man?
with her face all mad like a piece of wood,
like a horse, only anger in the face

When I come in from paseando
my lover asks me where are you coming from?
come here and have your candy
have your cake and your fried egg
eat my love and come here

My lover says when I come in from paseando
come here, "amorcito" (little love),
where are you coming from?
I have your candy, your cigarette amorcito
where are you coming from today?
naked like a baby, she says come here
your wife or your concubine which one do you want?

This Miskito song makes light of the man who finds his concubine more appealing than his wife. Women contend they do not care if their husbands have other lovers, commenting, "He's a man, isn't he? He's supposed to have other women." Women added, however, that their own husbands were jealous and would not stand for they themselves to have lovers. Therefore, different gender expectations

exist in Miskito society, which made it socially acceptable for men to have outside partners, flirtations, and children while the women were looked down upon for the same behavior.[7] Kuri women who took similar sexual liberties as men were often eviscerated by men. Kuri men claimed that these women acted like men.

Most interpersonal conflicts among Miskito men and women had to do with the double sexual standard. The Miskito men often claimed they had divorced because their wives were "huba waikna laik"(boy crazy). Kuri women, on the other hand, claimed that many of their marriages and relationships had ended because their husbands were "huba wanina" (really jealous). Many women said that their husbands beat them when they "talked" to other men.[8] Huba waikna laik (she's boy crazy) and huba wanina (he's jealous) were common cries in the battle of the sexes, a classic "he said"--"she said" argument that remains unresolved.[9]

Village and Regional Exogamy

Most Kuri women married men from outside of the region (see Tables 6.8 and 6.9). The region includes the villages along the reserve's north coast between Barra Plátano and Ibans, including villages up the Plátano and Paulaya Rivers. I interviewed all 32 mothers in Kuri to find out where the fathers of their children were born and lived before coming to Kuri. My results show that nearly 60% of the fathers come from outside of the region.

# adult women	32	# of different unions producing children	65

Table 6.8 Women's Total Number of Different Marital Unions

Women who had children with someone from within the village	3
Women who had children with someone from within the reserve region	24
Women who had children with someone from outside of the reserve region	38

Table 6.9 Women's Level of Exogamy

The lobster-diving industry has thrived for over thirty years on the coast, drawing Miskito men from other regions, as well as men from other indigenous and ethnic groups into the work force. Versus of another Miskito song (performed by W. Suarez and E. Guevarra) shows that men come from far away to marry women along the coast and often return to their homes after their marriages have ended.

Sirpi Luhpi Mairin/Little Bitty Woman

Little bitsy woman
for you I came paddling
in the middle of a big river
I left paddling
little-bitsy woman
the most important (or biggest) woman
the smallest woman

Little bitsy woman
only for you I came to your land
but only bad things you did to me
and so I went back again
little-bitsy woman

Kuri women frequently married men from outside of the village, region, and ethnic group. These men typically did not know the local kinship relations, terms of reference, or reciprocity obligations among their wife's family. Because of this, women controlled more traditional Miskito culture than the men. The women knew village histories, genealogies, kinship terms, kinship duties and obligations, and local folklore better than the men. The women also maintained traditional healing knowledge, largely controlling the abundant plant knowledge in the region. Most "curanderas" (plant specialists) and spiritual healers or "sukias" were women (5 of 7) on the coast; and women, in their everyday role as mothers, controlled a vast knowledge of plant remedies to care for their family's health.[10]

In sum, women of the female-centered residential group transmit traditional culture and language to the children not only because the men were gone but because the women were the more traditional gender (Helms 1971). Helms (1971:109) says: "Women continue to handle the traditional side of Miskito life. They continue the public usage of kinship terms and teknonymy and retain charge of food distribution." She regarded women as more traditional than men in their language and kinship practices. Therefore, she believes that related women of the matrigroup formed the

conservative cultural core in Miskito society that pass on traditions between generations. This is especially true in marriages between non-Miskito men coastal women. Thus, "Miskitoness" is normally passed down from mother to child.

Female-Headed Households

The majority of Kuri households (86 percent in 1991; 84 percent in 1998) were female-headed, composed mainly of women and their children (see Table 6.9.1). Households qualify as female-headed for two reasons: 1) because the women's husbands were away working (58 percent in 1991; 44 percent in 1998), and 2) because women were not married (42 percent of households in 1991; 40 percent in 1998) with households headed by single mothers.

	1991	1998
Total households	22	25
Total female-headed	19	21
Husband away working	11	11
Single mother	8	10

Table 6.9.1 Household Composition

In 1998, 10 single mothers headed households and 11 married women headed households whose husbands worked and lived away from the village. Only four men were present on a daily basis in Kuri: two pastors, one retired teacher, and one "dama," (grandfather) who had separated from his wife, Kuka Lyvian, and moved into one of his daughter's households. Thus, the coastal village of Kuri remained the women and children's domain.

Total number of mothers	32
Total number of single mothers	14
Single mothers heading households	10
Single mothers living in their parents households	4

Table 6.9.2 Single Mothers and Household Structure in Kuri

My research shows 36 percent of Kuri households were headed by single moms in 1991, with this increasing to 40 percent in 1998 (Table 6.9.1). Even more single mothers in Kuri than the data suggests. Almost half (14 of 32, or 47 percent) of all mothers were single moms in 1998, but four of these single mothers and their children lived with their parents in extended family households (Table 6.9.2).[11]

Most single mothers in Kuri receive no economic support from the fathers of their children. One of the Kuka's daughters said, "I have no regrets," she continued, "I am glad to have my children, be in my mother's house, and be protected by my

sisters." She justified her stance saying, "The men (husbands) in our lives are unstable." Many of these women's households relied on their brothers for help. Brothers are important men in single mothers' lives. One Sunday, I heard a brother say to his sister when visiting, "Who brings you flour?..."Who brings you meat?..."Are you going to say that I'm not a good brother?"

Households with Half-Siblings and Adopted Kin

Results show that many Kuri households had the presence of both half-siblings and adopted children. Data show that 23 percent of Kuri households, in 1991, and 39 percent of Kuri households, in 1998, had half-siblings as members. Because of their heightened number of unions on the coast, women have children with various spouses. The Miskito practice patrinomy, passing down the father's surname to the off-spring, whether or not the parents of the child are married. Because of the dual practice of serial monogamy and patrinomy, their households generally included half-siblings with several different last names.

Many Kuri households (32 percent, in 1991; and 36 percent, in 1998) had adopted children. Some sisters adopted each other's children, especially young girls, to live in their homes.[12] Typically, a mother would give one of her daughters to a female relative who had no young girls in her home to help with domestic chores.

Women who could not have children, whose children were grown, or who had a disproportionate number of boys, were those who adopted girls.

In Kuri, three of Kuka Denecela's daughters were the closest of friends despite the fact that they were in different houses: one was raised in her own household; another in her oldest daughter's, and the third in her sister's. A system of "keeping-while-giving" (Weiner 1992) occurred whereby the exchange of daughters maintained ties between households and matrilocal groups. Because adopted girls usually live in the same matrilocal residential group as their biological mother, it mattered little in which household young girls were raised: all female descendants inherit land from the Kuka's family and share subsistence foods, game meat, and other resources.

The children raised in this way kept two systems of kinship terms in tact, one with each family. Once adopted, the young girl begins to call her aunt, sister, or grandmother, "Yapti" or "Mama" and adopt new kinship terms for the whole household, reflecting her new membership status. All the while, though, she will continue to refer to her biological mother as "Yapti" or "Mama" and use the same kinship terms as she always did with members of her former family. Even the children adopted at birth use this dual kinship system.

Adoptions within the matrigroup can be temporary or last throughout one's life, but are not usually sanctioned by a higher authority than the matrilocal group. Legal adoptions sanctioned by the Honduran government also occur, where parents

acquire documentation signed by the child's birth mother. When a child lives with a family for an extended period of time, the parents usually legally adopt him or her.

In all but two of the cases of adoption in 1998, the children were adopted from a woman's mother, daughter, or sister. Half of all households had, at one time, an adopted child of a female relative living there. Many more had children that were temporary boarders over the years; households were constantly changing and children often lived between two or more homes.

Matrilineal and Patrilineal Land Inheritance

In north-coast Miskito villages like Kuri, matrilocal residential patterns refortified land inheritances through the female line. Matrilocality provides rights of every daughter to settle on her mother's lands, with access to family agricultural lands up river. Sons also inherit family village and agricultural lands, but most leave Kuri after marriage, moving near their wife's family and fields. With most marriages being exogamous at the village level, Kuri women had intergenerational "staying power" and garnered the lion's share of land rights and inheritances. Only the few sons who married women without access to village or agricultural lands used their family's. In total, only three men in Kuri have built their houses on their mother's village property and also use his family's agricultural lands up-river, and one other man (who resides in Utla Almuk) also uses his family's agricultural lands.

Men were named as founders of each general neighborhood in Kuri because they physically labored to clear the land. However, once cleared, the land was passed down mostly through the female line. Disputes do occur based on differing opinions as to whether land is inherited through one's mother or father (matrilineally or patrilineally). Kuri has always been matrilocal, where women marry men from other villages, regions, and ethnic groups while living close to their mothers. Therefore, many claim that they inherited land from their mother simply because their father was not originally from there. Others claimed they inherited lands from their father who often cleared village neighborhoods and sometimes purchased their own agricultural lands after marrying locally.[13]

Other disputes arise over land titling, which began in the last twenty years. If a family is living on a property for a few years and then titled it, the land becomes their legal possession in front of the law. They went to Brus Laguna to receive a legal documentation from the Municipality detailing their claim. This costs money so not many people can do this. Often other family members contested these claims locally, claiming that a family member did not have private rights to communal family lands. These legitimate contestations remain unresolved in the legal area, given the status of being in a Biosphere Reserve. However, privatizing lands has become common practice, even though those who title their lands may be considered tricky, or even

thieves. Most lands in Kuri were titled in the women's name, because they claimed to have inherited the land from their mothers.

Fruit trees are less alienable than land in Kuri.[14] Even after families move to other parts of the village and lose ownership of their former property, they retain ownership of their trees and their fruit. Owners of trees come back for their fruits no matter who presently "owns" the land. Villagers told me about trees, "If you planted it, it's yours." This may have been particular to Kuri where kinship relations existed between the new and former property dwellers.

Because women stay intergenerationally in Kuri, village residential lands and the fruit trees on them are usually inherited from mother to daughter. Many mothers pointed out trees to me and indicated which daughter would inherit them, often planning the layout for their future matrigroup. In my interviews, no mother ever pointed to a fruit tree and said, "this is for my son." They always showed me the land and trees that they designated for each daughter. Their sons, they claimed, would move to the village of their wife to live.

Coconut trees ("kuku dusa") are important year-round fruits that locals use for a refreshing drink and for cooking. Miskito women use coconuts daily in their cooking, sometimes preparing rice with coconut three times a day. Mothers typically planted coconut trees upon the birth of a female child and referred to this as the girl's

property even as the fledgling tree grew. By the time the girl would have her own household and children, the tree planted at her birth would be bearing fruit.

A woman uses fruit from her trees to generate cash for her household and to enter into reciprocity relations within the matrigroup and with other friends. A woman informally markets her fruit when it is in season, sending her children to climb trees for mangoes or knock down "blums" (plums) with a stick while the buyer waits. Most fruits are taken off the trees immediately and do not last long. However, some fruits such as "kasao" (cashew) and "nance" (a yellow berry) are plentiful enough for women to make into jam, which they sell to friends and neighbors.

Matrifocality

My case study shows that Kuri has matrilocal post-marital residence rules where after marrying, couples lived near the wife's family. Mothers, daughters, and sisters lived near each other throughout out their lives. These related women formed a conservative core that passes on Miskito language, kinship practices, and social identities to their children without the daily presence of men. The central role of motherhood in society provides women's access to power and resources, primarily through their children. With the men gone or from outside regions, female-centered reciprocity networks flourished and children had closer relationships with relatives on their mother's side of the family. Indeed, due to emigration of men to the coast for

work, children often did not know their father's family that lived in a different region. Kuri's matrilocal groups were also characterized by female-headed households where women made all child-rearing and household economic decisions. Access to resource rites were controlled by the female-centered kin network and one traced land inheritance and kinship relations primarily through the female line. Therefore, Kuri was not only matrilocal, but it was also largely matrifocal (as defined in chapter three) in its domestic organization.

In the next sections, I set up a comparison between Kuri and Asang that I use to reveal Kuri's uniquely female-centered social organization. My analysis suggests that a more permanent matrilocality and matrifocality exist in Kuri due to its settlement patterns and interactions with outside forces along the coast.

Kuri and Asang Compared

Most present day information on Miskito social organization was provided by Mary Helms' study in Asang, a riverine community on the Rio Coco where patrilocal residential patterns occurred and men were present on a daily basis. After marriage couples lived near the man's family and close relations existed between members of the patrilocal residential group. Asang men in the late 1960's and early 1970's worked in their nearby agricultural fields and returned to their village nightly. In Helm's Asang, no "boom" economy existed to take men away from their villages due to a

"bust" or decline in the wood cutting industry (Helms 1971:31, 232). Claudia Garcia followed Helm's study in Asang in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Garcia (1996a, 1997) found increasing matrilocal post-marital residence and some male absenteeism, but her data on social organization is limited. She (1996b:18) discusses how the historic pattern of male-absenteeism resulted during the Sandinista wars due to the Miskito men's participation in military endeavors. Garcia's data will be introduced when helpful, however, hers is not a complete study as was Helms. I will later discuss Garcia's findings in relation to my own.

In contrast with Helm's Asang, a "boom" economy existed in Kuri and along the north coast--the lobster-diving industry. Men in coastal villages like Kuri work in the booming lobster economy and women live together at home in matrilocal groups where they raised their children together.[15] Helms would attribute the different forms of social organization found in villages like Kuri in the late 1990's and Asang in the 1970's directly to their different stages in the "boom and bust" economy. She believed that matrilocal residence occurred during economic "boom" stages of the economy and that patrilocal residence occurred during "bust" stages (see the culture history section in chapter two). Our studies in Asang and Kuri seemingly support her thesis. My work in Kuri, however, shows that matrilocal residential patterns have existed since the village was founded 100 years ago. My thesis is that distinct settlement

patterns and interactions with outside forces in the coastal region have caused a more permanent matrilocality in coastal villages like Kuri than in riverine ones like Asang.

The next two charts compare Asang and Kuri's distinct "settlement patterns and interactions with outside forces" that resulted in each region. The following chart lists factors characteristic of each region:

	Coastal Kuri	Riverine Asang
Migrant subsistence labor	+	
Migrant wage labor	+	
Emigration of men into the region	+	
Cash-oriented "boom"economy	+	
Strong Moravian influence	+	

Table 6.9.3 Settlement Patterns and Interactions with Outside Forces

The data indicates that settlement patterns influence the region's social organization (Table 6.9.3). Male absenteeism results in part because the villages are located on the coast, a day or more travel from their riverine agricultural and hunting camps where men work. Coastal villages also lie in the lobster-diving economic zone, where men are taken off-shore to work. Thus, women live matrilocally due to men's participation in both migrant subsistence and wage labor.

Interactions with outside economies along the coast has also affected social organization. The coast serves as the market center of Moskitia and has constant

commercial activity and booming industries. A century of different extractive industries has hired men away from their villages and families. This caused a consistent emigration of men to the region looking for work who marry locally. Local women have many exogamous marriages to men from outside the region. Children often never know their father's families and most kinship and reciprocity networks exist on one's mother's side. Emigration, along with regional exogamy, causes more emphasis on ties between members of the matrilocal group in Kuri.

Honduran Miskito social organization seems to have more permanent matrilocal features than in Asang. The Moravian Church also has had less influence in the Honduran Moskitia than on the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast. Moravian Missionaries arrived in Nicaragua fifty to seventy years before they did in Honduras (Marx 1980). The Moravian Church's patriarchical ideology consisting of nuclear families, monogamy, and male heads of household did not have as much time to influence local Miskito customs in Honduras. Here, serial monogamy and cases of temporary unions between women and men creates households in which single mothers raise children from different fathers.

What follows is a comparison and contrast between modern day coastal and riverine social structure based on research by Helms, Garcia, and myself.

	Coastal Kuri	Riverine Asang
Level of Exogamy		
Family	+	+
Village	+	
Region	+	
Ethnic Group	+	
Post-Marital Residence		
Matrilocal	+	+
Patrilocal		+
Union Type		
Monogamy	+	+
Serial Monogamy	+	

Table 6.9.4 Marriage Trends

	Coastal Kuri	Riverine Asang
Household Composition		
Nuclear	+	+
Extended	+	+
Female-headed	+	
Male absent	+	
Single mother	+	
Outside children	+	
Adopted children	+	

Table 6.9.5 Household Composition Trends

	Coastal Kuri		Riverine Asang	
Household Composition	1991	1997	1969	1993
Single nuclear family	32%	16%	54%	50%
Any combo w/ nuclear	55%	36%	86%	90%
Female headed	36%	40%	4%	10%
Half-siblings in household	23%	39%	1%	
Adopted child of mother, daughter, or sister	32%	36%	2%	

6.9.6 Asang vs. Kuri: Household Composition

Analysis shows that coastal villages like Kuri display a more permanent matrilocal and matrifocal emphasis than riverine villages like Asang. By comparing village social organization in Asang and Kuri, we can see how the different forms of marriage and household composition occurs, causing one to have a more permanent matrilocal and matrifocal emphasis on social organization. Based on my findings in Kuri in comparison with Helms' findings in Asang, it seems that present day Miskito social organization varies between coastal and riverine villages. On the coast, there was more emphasis on female-centered ties on the domestic level. My case study in

Kuri is further compared to Asang to show how the Plátano Miskito also increasingly trace kinship and descent matrilineally.

Increasingly Matrilineal Systems of Kinship and Descent

Helms (1971) documented Miskito systems of kinship and descent in her study of Asang. She showed that individual nuclear family households (headed by a man in the husband-father role) tied into the larger kiamp, or patrilineal descent group, including all members related through the male line. Because Asang was also patrilocal, fathers, brothers and sons lived near each other, thereby strengthening male authority and local ties between members of the kiamp. However, Helms (1971: 98-109) shows that related women and children formed the stable social core and maintained kinship and reciprocity relations and other aspects of traditional culture.[16]

With patrilocality and patrilineality co-existing, all men and children of the residential group were also members of the same kiamp. Because the Miskito also practice patrinomy, where the male surname is passed down to the children, the minimum unit of a kiamp was a father and his children with the same surname. The wife-mother always kept her own father's surname and was considered part of his kiamp (Helms 1971: 72-73). In Asang, Helms (1971:55) describes how the kinship term kiamp, used with a male surname, such as Ferrera kiamp, referred to all

members of the patrilineal descent group and to the area of the village where the family lived:

> ...Asang can be identified as groups of people related to each other through kinship. In this sense the village loses a common unity and is seen instead as composed of many kiamps--kinship groups to which an individual belongs by virtue of having the same family name. Because of the pattern of marital residence, the kiamps tend to occupy separate geographical locations within the village. (Helms 1971:54)."

At the time of Helms' study in the late 1960s, Asang residents conceptualized the village as being made up of 27 kiamps with separate geographical locations (1971:55,74). Helms (1971:74) shows Sanders, Joseph, and Bobb kiamps occupied the largest family grounds on her map of the village. Two major family divisions of the village were based on the Bobb and Sanders surnames, two of the original families to settle the village.[17] Helms (1971:75) states that the kiamp does not hold property. In Garcia's (1997:7) later study of Asang, she found that things had changed:

> households connect to the other households of the community with who they share a common surname. In this way the Asang kiamp is formed and is generally located in the same delimited space as the maternal line.

While Garcia found increasing matrilocal patterns, the male surname shared by the father and his descendants continued to define the kiamp. She (1997:7-8) reported that sisters of the matrigroups, who most commonly share the male surnames of "Bobb, Sanders, Peters, Mercado, Maxwell, Herrera, Escobar, Pedro, Kittler, Hunter,

and Wilson," uphold ties of the kiamps. Garcias' conclusions differ from Helms because she found Asang to have matrilocally organized patrilineal groups.

Loss of the Kiamp

The most basic kinship group in Kuri is the female-headed household, which is tied into the larger matrilocal residential group, the main socio-economic support group in coastal society. Compared to the larger, riverine village of Asang that was composed of 27 kiamps with separate territories at the time of Helm's study, the smaller, coastal village of Kuri has five main matrilocal groups that occupied separate geographical territories. And where kiamps occupy a geographic territory associated with a common male surname in Asang (Garcia 1996a, 1997; Helms 1971), each residential group in Kuri has many different male surnames. This was accentuated on the coast by mothers having children from various spouses and having adopted and half-siblings in their households who each carry their father's surname. Even individual households had members with many different surnames or kiamps.

	# Surnames per household	
Women's households	1991	1998
Kuka Denecela's	4	4
Delfina's	5	5
Ilabia's	2	2
Enemecia's	3	3
Tomassa's	4	6

Table 6.9.7 Number of Surnames per Household in Kuri

The kiamp or patrilineal descent group, as described by Helms and Garcia in Asang, was symbolized by a common male surname and also occupied an area of the village. In contrast to this, in coastal Miskito villages like Kuri, households and residential groups were composed of members from many different kiamps, demonstrated by the presence of many different surnames in households (Table 6.9.7). For example, Kuka Denecela's matrigroup (composed of five households) had 30 individuals who had 14 different surnames in 1991, and 35 individuals who had 17 different surnames in 1998. Thus, the kiamp, as described by Helms, and even Garcia, has diminished on the coast and does not function due to the increasing emphasis on matrilineal relatives.

Refortified by coastal marriage and household composition patterns, there was little emphasis on patrilineal kin in Kuri. The kiamp or patrilineal descent group did not function to create the important ties between households or larger residential groups. Because of the many men who came to the coast to work seasonally, married locally, and then deserted their wives, many coastal children rarely knew their father's relatives. In these cases, children are raised entirely by their mother's side of the family. In other scenarios, members of the same kiamp are in conflictive social relations. Because a man passes down his surname to all of his children, including those from different mothers, his descendants are half-siblings, of the same kiamp. Often these relations are filled with jealousies and rivalries, stemming from competition between mothers or co-wives. These relatives, while having the same surname, live in different villages, do not share resources, and try to avoid each other.

Mary Helms defined the kiamp as a patrilineal descent group symbolized by the common male surname. Garcia also recognized the presence of the kiamp as such. The term "kiamp" on the Honduran coast, however, is primarily used today to refer to one's seasonal agricultural camp where work is shared by relatives of the matrigroup. "Camp" may be the English origin of the Miskito word "kiamp." Only when used with the possessive suffix "-ka" (forming the word "kiampka") do locals ever refer to one's father's family's surname, such as "Ferrera kiampka." However, the

word is now more often used with a woman's first name, such as "Lyvian kiampka." This refers to the residential group that consists of descendants of Kuka Lyvian who occupy a geographic area. "Lyvian kiampka," then, refers to a land-owning, residential, kin group who trace their descent unilineally through the female line. Thus, the term kiamp is now being used to refer to a matrilineage. Therefore, it seems that matrilineal social organization thrives in Kuri beneath a thin veil of patrinomy, where children inherit their father's surnames.

This contrasts with most complete study of Miskito social organization in the riverine village of Asang, where residence was patrilocal (Helms 1971) and matrilocal (1996a) and the kiamp functioned as the main kinship group in society. Therefore, my work presents data showing that Miskito society has increasingly matrilineal features of village organization for the first time. Women's individual houses were tied into larger residential groups also based on ties between females. Perhaps because of the strong matrilocal emphasis in Kuri, there was a simultaneous diminshing of patrilineal emphasis on social structure. It seemed the matrilocal compound was the largest most viable group in coastal Miskito social structure. No socio-economic organization above the residential group existed. As shown in this chapter, the matrilocal residential compound largely replaced the traditional "kiamp" as the larger descent group and socio-economic network that reciprocates goods and

services. For the coastal Miskito, the traditional kiamp or patrilineal descent group no longer functions to create society's most important social and economic ties, replaced instead by ties between members of the matrilocal group.

Miskito women's high status and high level of "female autonomy" results from their increasing control of residence patterns and descent systems. Long ago, Martin and Voorhies (1975) and Friedl (1975) viewed women and men's status in relation to rules of post-marital residence and descent in horticultural societies.[18] They demonstrated that women in matrilocal and matrilineal societies--like coastal Kuri in the 1990s--have higher status than women in patrilocal and patrilineal horticultural societies--like riverine Asang in the 1970's. My study differs from Helm's classic ethnography that details Miskito social organization as patrilocal and patrilineal. Therefore, my work breaks new ground in Central American and Caribbean ethnology by presenting coastal Miskito society as matrilocal, matrifocal, and increasingly matrilineal for the first time.

My work demonstrates predominantly matrilocal patterns along the coast. While my results only show that these patterns exist in Kuri, I observed matrilocal patterns for the other Río Plátano Miskito villages, including New Jerusalem, Utla Almuk, Tasbapauni, and Barra Plátano. Many of these matrilocal patterns result from the men working in the lobster industry. Because the lobster industry draws men from the interior Moskitia villages, patterns of matrilocality also may be developing

in riverine Miskito settlements. However, further research is needed to determine whether matrilocality, as found among the coastal Río Plátano Miskito, is characteristic of broader Miskito social patterns in Honduras.

Notes to Chapter Six

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1. While both Pastors had kinship ties to Kuri, they asked permission to build on different kukas' lands. The church provided them with temporary use of agricultural lands up the Plátano river.

2. Glady's ex-husband Samuel Guevarra owns Triste and is used by their children.

3. Translation by author--the original text is in Spanish. She cites Collins' (1994) work, studying motherhood among an Afro-American group, as being particularly relevant to the study of Miskito women. Collins (1994, in Garcia 1996b:14) viewed the role of mother as a situational phenomenon which is related to the survival of the group's ethnic and racial identity.

4. Church marriages were conducted by local Pastors of the Moravian, Pentecostal, and Catholic churches while legal marriages were registered by law in Brus Laguna, the nearby administrative district.

5. Only one woman would not reveal the identity nor history of the men that fathered two of her children. For the purposes of the data, I assumed these men were different because the children were separated in age by nearly twenty years.

6. The men's children are spread out in different villages because after divorce, they always stayed with their mothers.

7. Men even gained prestige for being able to support more than one family.

8. The word "aisaia" literally means to talk, but the Plátano Miskito also use the word as a euphemism for having sex. It was sometimes unclear to me in the subtleties of

Miskito discourse whether the woman who used the word aisaia merely flirted or had sexual relations with another man.

9. Where Helms (1976a) and Dennis (1985) found men's promiscuity as threatening to society in their studies, mine shows women are as equally if not more threatening in Kuri society.

10. House (1997:7) claims that the difference between curanderos or herb specialists and sukias is that sukias cure by going face to face with spirits where as herb specialists--like Miskito women--use plants as the intermediary between people and spirits. Plants and recipes used in potions vary between families and are considered personal property (Dennis 1988). Family recipes differ between matrigroups. This demonstrates how the inheritance of medicinal and magical plant knowledge is transmitted through the female line.

11. Two of these five single moms lived in consanguineal households, forming the classic matrifocal units described by Gonzalez (1969) among the Garífuna--a senior single mother and her single daughters with children.

12. All households in the case study had members who either had been adopted themselves by other female relatives while growing up or who have adopted other children of female relatives. Usually female children were exchanged.

13. Kane (1994), discusses a similar pattern among the Emberá, of Darién, Panama.

14. In many interviews I asked household heads how many trees they had. They would often count trees where they used to live indicating that they still retained control over them. Thus, one can determine past residences and claims to land in Kuri by asking people which trees they own.

15. Helms (1971:31, 232) sees the Miskito social structure in Asang was caused by their recent bust in the Pine Industry and men returned to the villages to live with their wives and children permanently.

16. Despite patrilocal residential patterns that she reported in Asang during the early 1970s, Helms believes the stable core of related women in the village, especially ties between mother and child, is highly valued in society.

17. This suggests a tendency toward patrilocality that would extend through both "boom" and "bust" cycles.

18. Yolanda and Robert Murphy's Women of the Forest (1974) studied the Mundurucu, a matrilocal and matrilineal society in South American rain-forest tribe.

Chapter Seven: Male Authority

This chapter examines how gender and power relations are played out in the economic organization of the Río Plátano Biosphere. The chapter begins by reviewing the broader Miskito economics in the section, "The Purchase Society and Boom and Bust Economies." My study shows that the Plátano Miskito are increasingly involved with the market economy. Since the coast was settled one-hundred years ago, there have been no true "bust" stages on the north coast of the Plátano Biosphere. Even when industries over exploited their resources and they left the region, another industry was there to replace it. Therefore, the lobster industry is the latest of many "boom" industries there over the last century.

In the section "Boom Economies," I detail the most recent incursions of the market economy on the coast, including lobstering, cocaine trafficking, and eco-tourism. The next section, "Gendered Division of Cash Labors," uses data from Kuri to show that a strict gendered division of labor exists where men alone participate in lobster diving and other wage earning jobs. I then present the sections, "Household Economies," "Lobster Divers (Buzos) in Kuri," and "Economics of Kuka Denecela's Matrigroup" to show how women's households mainly survive on money that the lobster divers provide to them. The case study of Kuka's matrilocal group details the different strategies related women use to keep their households financially afloat.

Lastly, the section, "Cash Obsessions," examines the cash-oriented obsessions that locals display along the coast. The prolonged "boom" in the lobster industry has

caused Rio Plátano Miskito women to develop a heightened physical and psychological dependence on store-bought items and cash. Miskito women's households also are increasingly dependent on cash as a resource. Because male lobster divers alone provide cash to society, women's desires for cash and store-bought items reinforces men's power or "male authority." Chapters six and seven set up the contradictory gender and power complex in Miskito society where women have a high level of "female autonomy" in matrilocal group at the village level, but men maintain their "male authority" as the main wage earners in society.

The Purchase Society and Boom-and-Bust Economies

Mary Helms first described the Miskito as the "purchase society" in her now classic 1971 ethnography on the Miskito peoples. At the time of Helms' work, the Miskito could not be characterized as purely an indigenous-subsistence based economy or as a rural peasantry, wholly dependent on the market economy.[1] Helms (1969a:325-342, 1971:7) chose the term "purchase society" because these societies have members who earn money in outside markets and who become physically and psychologically dependent on store-bought items to survive. Foreign goods, which can be purchased with money, became cultural necessities for the Miskito people.

> "The definitive characteristic of any purchase society is the articulation of local society with the wider complex world through economic channels of trade and wage labor, while political autonomy and a stable social organization are maintained. The term "purchase society" is suggested because it emphasizes both the economic referent in general, and the specific aspect of that referent which appears most important from the point of view of the local society, and towards which local adaptations will be directed, i.e., the need to obtain, to "purchase," through one means or another, foreign manufactured goods, which have acquired the status of cultural necessities. To be sure, something must be exchanged or sold in order to acquire these goods, but to the local population, that which is sold is merely a means to the all important end of purchasing" (Helms 1971:7).

Helms defined a series of "boom and bust" economies that have characterized the entire Moskitia region since the colonial period. Nicaraguan Miskito men were involved as migrant wage laborers in various "boom" industries including rubber, gum, lumber, gold, coconuts, bananas, turtleing, and other forest goods (Helms 1971; see also Dodds 1998; Offen 1999). Nietschmann's (1974) "When the Turtle Collapses, the World Ends" refers to the turtleing industry that dominated the Nicaraguan Miskito coastal economy. Nietschmann believed that when the turtle industry crashed, the coastal Miskito economy of Nicaragua would feel the affects of a dramatic "bust." Helms (1971) described how the Miskito psychologically adapted to the "boom and bust" economy. During "boom" cycles, villagers became dependent on purchased goods, but during "bust" periods, when industries collapsed, they had a

hard time adjusting to not having store-bought items. They experience feelings of depression and helplessness.[2] Helms (1971:224-225) said:

> this feeling is not only expressed in their formal prayers, but also is often heard in their daily conversation: "Dia daukaia; help apu; pruaia baman--what's to be done; there is no help; we can only die.

Similar "boom and bust" economies have occurred in the Honduran Moskitia in the last century. Dodds (1998:8) observed:

> For the coastal Miskito of Honduras, the lobster export industry, in which Miskito males work for wages as divers and canoemen, is only the most recent incursion of the global market economy into eastern Honduras. Historically, the region has experienced a series of boom-and-bust industries, especially since the 19th century onward. These industries have been extractive in nature, focusing on rubber, gum, lumber, gold, coconuts, bananas, and other forest goods; and in most cases the Miskito were involved as wage laborers in these industries.

My interviews with Río Plátano Miskito elders and Kuri adults reveal more specifics. Miskito men worked with foreign banana companies on the Río Plátano from the late 1900's until the 1920's. They next worked for various industries extracting rubber, animal hides, and sarsaparilla from Plátano forests from the late 1920's to the 1960's. In addition to these local opportunities, many men also worked in Belize in the 1920's and Nicaragua in the 1950's and 1960's cutting mahogany trees for North American lumber companies. Deep-water lobster diving began in the early 1970's and continues today. And in recent years, eco-tourism and drug trafficking economies have also taken hold in the region.

My data shows that there have been no true "bust" periods on the north coast of Plátano Biosphere. Instead, a variety of "boom" economies have flourished since the coastal Plátano villages were founded; although some industries "busted," there was always another one to replace it. Dodds (1998) believes the "boom and bust" economy was less relevant on the north coast of the Plátano Biosphere than in Nicaragua because of the north coast's role as the market center, where cash-earning jobs, stores, and goods were located. Indeed, the north coast was the historic economic hub or market center of the region, having had the region's first stores 100 years ago. This remains true today. Within a six kilometer stretch of beach and savanna that includes ten or so coastal villages (from Piñales to Barra Plátano), there are more than fifty stores. In fact, villages such as Barra Plátano function as trading posts, where stores line every path. Therefore, the north coast's role as the economic hub of the region has caused a more or less, constant "boom" atmosphere to prevail for more than a century.

Boom Economies

Lobster Industry

The lobster industry has probably had the greatest economic impact of any "boom" economy that has operated in Moskitia over the last century. The lobster-diving industry began around 1970 (Dodds 1998, 2001; Herlihy and Herlihy 1991). Miskito men work as deep-sea lobster divers on boats owned mostly by Honduran

Bay Islanders and other national and international businessmen. Much of the lobster that Miskito divers harvest in national and international waters has eventually been sold to Red Lobster, a United States restaurant chain (Dodds 1998, 2001; Neitschmann 1997). Dodds said (1998:11):

> Since the early 1970s, the lobster export industry has been the primary source of cash flow into the coastal Miskito communities of Honduras. Boats based in the Bay Islands come to the coastal communities of the Mosquitia to pick up Miskito men and boys as divers and canoemen. The boats then search for spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) in the continental shelf waters off Honduras and Nicaragua, and as far away as Colombia. After an excursion, the Miskito sea-workers are then dropped off along the coast at their respective villages while the boats continue on to the Bay Islands; there, the catch of lobster tails is frozen and packed for shipping, mostly to the United States.

Lobster divers are earning larger sums of cash, especially after adopting tanks in the early 1980s. Older divers told me that when the industry began around 1970, they were paid L. 1.50 (or US .15) per pound of lobster. Dodds (1998:13) reports that in 1992, Miskito divers from the reserve's north coast made L. 10.00 per pound of lobster. By the 1998 season, I witnessed the divers receiving between L. 35-40.00 (or US $3.5-4.00) per pound. As a result, Miskito households have become increasingly reliant on cash and store-bought items and their agricultural labor has decreased. Dodds (1998:13) explains, "Lobster work thus offers a high return to labor in wages. One successful 12-day outing can provide as much cash income to a diver as a year of working diligently in the fields to produce and market a cash crop."

A crude estimate is that the lobster divers, during the 1997-98 season, contributed US 3.2 million dollars per year into the economies of the Plátano Biosphere's north coast villages, between Piñales and Barra Plátano.[3] At the time, local divers claim there were about 4,000 buzos (divers) and cayuqueros (canoemen) in the Honduran Moskitia. This was also the Honduran Ministry of Public Health's estimate for the number of Miskito men who worked in the lobster industry (Proyecto Nautilo 1993:6, in Dodds 1998:13). Twenty-five boats operated between Ibans and Barra Plátano, employing 700-800 buzos (divers) and cayuqueros (canoemen). Thus, about one fifth of all Honduran Miskito divers and canoemen are from the north coast of the Plátano Biosphere.

The north coast is one of the most important economic hubs of the Moskitia region. Men seasonally emigrated to the coast for work on boats. Boats arrive to "extract" the local resources, in the form of male divers, many of whom come from nearby regions such as Brus Lagoon, Paulaya, Baltimore, and the upper Plátano and Patuca. Lobster boats do not generally take divers from Garífuna settlements, or from the Miskito town of Brus Laguna. The lobster business picks up again in Barra Patuca,[4] just east of Brus. The largest lobster industry thrives elsewhere along the Miskito Coast of Honduras around the so-called Zona Recuperada (the territory closest to the Nicaraguan border).

Buzos and cayuqueros may work a few trips, every trip, or combine diving with their agricultural duties. Many combine occupations creatively, such as one buzo who is also a part-time pastor for the Evangelical Pentecostal Church. Other men who work as farmers, teachers, or professionals may also take a trip during any given season, often to get money for their children's clothes and school supplies. The first trip of the diving season is, by far, the largest take of lobsters for the entire season. Therefore, men generally earn greater amounts at the beginning of the season when the lobster beds are full, decreasing their earnings as the season continues.

Although luck is held responsible for different harvest amounts, an experienced diver is generally more successful than beginners. The canoeman who works with a diver is paid a percentage of the diver's take-home pay. Indeed, my informal interviews with divers shows that experienced lobster divers earned the most

money, sometimes up to 12,000.00 Lempiras per trip (US$ 1,200.00), while inexperienced divers and canoemen earned much less per trip (around L. 2-3,000.00 or US $2-300.00). One buzo commented:

> the good divers know that the real money is had by divers who see everything in the ocean as a resource and grabs everything he sees -- conch, mustro (mustro), turtles (aksbil), fish, etc. He can end up selling it all in the Islands when unloading the lobster.....The good divers were lucky (or had "suerte"), but even the good divers could come back with nothing. Anything was possible for one trip, especially if the Liwas (water spirits) were involved.

Estimating divers' incomes is difficult, because divers can have trips where they were lucky and earned lots of money or unlucky and earn nothing. Also, many divers become ill with symptoms of liwa mairin (mermaid or female water spirit) sickness that afflicts divers and miss part or all of a diving season. Nevertheless, Kuri men said that the average take-home pay for a lobster diver in Kuri is around L. 4,000.00 (or US $400.00). The majority of men go on two dives per month for eight months. Thus, in the ideal situation, an average annual take for a buzo in Kuri is about L. 64,000.00 (US $6,400.00). And because a canoemen earns about 20% of what a diver makes (Dodds 1998:13), his annual take would be about L. 12,800 (US $1,280.00).

Sacabuzos are local head hunters and money managers who work for boat captains. Dodds (1998:15) calls them diver foremen (or forewomen), and mentions their being responsible for the boat having enough divers and canoemen to leave for sea. Sacabuzos pay divers advances before leaving, mainly so that their families can

buy food items from the store while they are away. Once back on shore, sacabuzos also pay the divers based on the number of pounds of lobster they caught. Many divers count on large advances, receiving upwards of L. 800.00 (US 80.00), while their canoemen receive a smaller sum. Advances are then subtracted from the diver's total earnings. Thus, even before the divers and canoemen return to shore, they have spent much of their pay.

There are also other jobs related to the lobster industry that bring cash to the coast. Many Miskito work on boats as captains, marineros (sailors), men who fill the tanks with air, men who package and freeze the lobsters, mechanics, cooks and their assistants (plunki). On shore, they work as comanches (assistants) to sacabuzos.

For over thirty years, Miskito men have participated in the global economy by working as deep-water lobster divers. They are internationally known as being skilled deep-water divers and lobster hunters. Initially, as the economy developed, the men gained fame for diving without tanks, a time when lobsters were plentiful and the divers found them in shallow waters. For twenty years now, the lobster divers have used tanks, which enable them to dive deeper and stay underwater longer. Divers are forced to increasingly dive deeper to find lobsters because they have overexploited and diminished the natural resource. The national government has had to place an annual moratorium on lobster diving, between April and July to protect the resource.

The lobster industry is also characterized by its over exploitation of human resources in the Plátano Reserve. Miskito men in the reserve are the labor pool for

the lobster industry. Boat owners who employ them are guilty of many human rights abuses to the divers who are forced to live and dive in unsafe conditions using old diving equipment with no decompression chambers on board (Meltzoff and Schull 1999. Many have developed serious health problems related to their work, including the "bends" or decompression sickness, which the Miskito called liwa mairin or mermaid sickness. When a diver has symptoms of decompression sickness, such as paralyzation of the legs, the boat Captains do not always take him directly to sites with decompression chambers. Captains often simply drop off the injured divers on shore for treatment by local healers, shirking their responsibilities to the injured diver.

Lobster boat owners, many businessmen from the Bay Islands, sell their catch in the Islands, which is then sold in Florida to companies in the United States. Through this venue, Miskito men from the RPBR are tied into the national and international economy. Miskito men, then, are tied into the world market system as laborers who experience human right abuses while, at the same time, extracting a diminishing natural resource. Perhaps, this is not the scenario one would imagine for an indigenous group living in a protected area where the conservation of human and natural resources is the main goal.

Tourism

The Miskito of the Plátano Biosphere have recently experienced the development of a new eco-tourism industry, which took off in 1992. By 1996, about

1000 tourists annually traveled to the reserve's north coast to witness both the natural and cultural diversity. The political leaders in charge of tourism in Las Marías keep a book that all visitors signed and wrote down comments on their trip, which I read and interpreted. I also completed informal interviews with tourists who stayed in Kuri on their way up the Plátano River.

Most eco- and ethno-tourists that come to the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve display modernists proclivities, wanting to see the rainforest's flora and fauna as well as its "traditional" indigenous peoples. Because of this, tourists are drawn to the Las Marías area where the more "pure" or "authentic" Pech population lived surrounded by the forest. The racially mixed and cash-oriented Miskito did not fit the tourist's image of "Indians." Indeed, the tourists are often visibly startled by the Miskito people's financial savvy and level of involvement with the cash economy.[5]

Most tourists travel by motorized canoe up the Plátano River to visit the Pech settlements at Las Marías. Each tourist spends an estimated L. 2,000.00 (US $200.00) during his/her stay to pay for transportation, guides, room and board, and arts and crafts (when available). The eco-tourism industry has generated a US $200,000.00 per year since 1996. Few Miskito families, however, are part of this economy. Only a few families that have had access to cash to buy motors and boats, and to build restaurants and sleeping quarters, could capture part of this market. The only Kuri family involved with eco-tourism is that of Delfina Iden and Sixto George. Professor Sixto, a retired teacher and the lone professional in the village, has money to buy a

boat, a motor, and build a guest house. Sixto and Delfina's family receives about one group of tourists per month, earning on average about L. 1,000.00 (US $100.00) each. During the wet season of heavy rains there are few visitors, but in the dry season (especially April-June,) three or more groups may arrive each month. Thus, so far, tourism does not help the Miskito on a broad scale, but only economically advances the wealthier families who monopolize contracts with national tourist agencies.

Transportation routes are long and arduous from the interior Honduran cities to Moskitia. One flies from Tegucigalpa to La Ceiba and then on to Palacios in a smaller plane. Once in Palacios, one must travel by motorized dug-out (tuk-tuk) and then walk through the dry savanna and beach to reach the north coast of the Plátano Biosphere. Eco- and ethno-tourists that make the trip are mainly Germans, Canadians, and United States citizens whose strong currencies in Honduras make the trip affordable. Hondurans, for the most part, cannot afford the costs of travelling to Moskitia. Flight fees alone are US 150.00, more than most monthly salaries in the country. Furthermore, nationals see Moskitia as a backwards place where uncivilized Indians live, a place where most have no desire to go. Mainly Honduran social and biological scientists, students, and government and NGO employees travel to the region. Even though it is not at the top of their list for vacationing, the educated and emerging upper-middle class Hondurans are increasingly aware of the region's biological and cultural diversity and its importance.

Cocaine Trafficking

Cocaine trafficking is the newest economy to develop on the biosphere's north coast. In recent years, the cocaine industry has spread from Nicaragua through the Zona Recuperada into the Honduran Moskitia and the Río Plátano Reserve (Nietschmann 1997). One-gram portions of cocaine are widely available in 1998 at L. 100.00 (US 10.00 dollars). Most divers who use cocaine do so "recreationally," snorting it up their noses while also drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana and tobacco. Buzos purchase cocaine mostly for use (to party with), not to be redistributed for economic gain. Curiously, several local men have found "bultos" (packages) of cocaine washed ashore along the Plátano Biosphere's north coast. The men took the packages to Puerto Lempira and Barra Patuca to sell them. They live locally, have purchased homes and boats, and now enjoy reputations as "millionarios" (rich people).

Locals scan the beaches searching for any bultos that may have been dumped by boats because they know ocean-going traffickers dump their cocaine packages for coastal connections or when they are being pursued by anti-drug forces. Coastal connections pick up the bulto on the beach and hold it until an outsider arrives and retrieves the package. In other scenarios, a Miskito man may travel with the bulto to San Pedro or La Ceiba to meet the connection.

Older women in Kuri set out together at night in search of bultos of cocaine. They pray that they would become millionarios, like the two others had reportedly become. They view cocaine as money and not as an illegal substance. No strong moral judgements is cast upon those who dabbled in the business.

The cocaine industry in the Plátano Biosphere is probably not as developed as it is in other parts of the Honduran Moskitia, like in Puerto Lempira. Phillip Dennis (1997, personal communication) reports that in Nicaraguan villages, the presence of cocaine money has changed the cultural landscape. Houses are bigger and painted with bright colors and home-owners all have boats and out-board motors that they used to meet their off-shore drug connections. He also reports many deaths and illnesses related to cocaine addiction in men. Although the cocaine economy has not reached the Plátano Biosphere in a significant way, divers are beginning to buy the drug for use regularly. If the cocaine industry keeps growing, it may also bring unforeseen changes to the Plátano Biosphere.

Gendered Division of Cash Labors

The Río Plátano Miskito have a gendered division of labor where men participate in more significant wage-earning activities than women. Men, for example, are more involved than the women in the three current boom economies of lobster-diving, eco-tourism, and cocaine trafficking (Table 7.1).

Wage-earning labors open to only one sex	F	M
Buzo (lobster diver)		x
sawing trees down		x
selling wood to build homes		x
political office		x
pastor in the church		x
cocaine trafficking		x
carving dug-out canoes		x
carpenter – building houses		x
Comanche (assistant to a sacabuzo)	x	
Sewing	x	
macrame	x	
washing clothes	x	
ironing	x	
cooking	x	
prostitution	x	
housework	x	
child care	x	
having a guest house for tourists	x	
working in "rifa" (lottery)	x	
comedor (small restaurant)	x	
baking bread, cakes, and cookies	x	
selling beer and rum	x	
Wage-earning labors open equally to both sexes		
selling fruit and produce	x	x
selling firewood	x	x
store owner	x	x
selling fish or meat	x	x
Wage-earning labors open to both sexes, but dominated by one (marked with x)		
hunting and selling game from up-river		x
working in fields		x
eco-tourism guide		x
professor		x
development or NGO work		x
having a "water-taxi" service in the wet season		x
sacabuzo (manager of buzos on shore)		x
bodegas and selling store items from home	x	
curing	x	
sukia (supernatural healer)	x	
working in stores	x	
selling marijuana	x	

Table 7.1 Wage-Earning Opportunities and Gender in Kuri, 1998[6]

Examining the jobs available for men and women in Kuri shows that while women work in a larger number of jobs in the community, most are domestic tasks of a menial nature providing smaller wages (Table 7.1). Men, on the other hand, working fewer jobs, earned the lion's share of the wages to be had along the coast. Even women who have fairly steady cash-earning jobs as domestic workers in houses and stores only earn around 350 Lempiras (US 30.00 dollars) per week. This can not compare to the relatively inflated cash earnings of the men.

Miskito women generally earn cash for their households selling produce and fruit, plants and medicines, baking bread, or they find other jobs such as working in the fields or shops, housekeeping, or washing and ironing clothes (Table 7.1). What women earn from their jobs, however, cannot pay for the high costs of foods to feed their families. Most every household relies on money and gifts provided by the divers to stay afloat, especially single mothers with young children. Therefore, diving for lobster positions men in high positions of power as the major wage-earners in society.

Households survive mainly by accessing the divers' cash resources. In general, women with buzos in their households, especially as husbands and sons access the most money, while women in households without buzos access much less. Yet even women's households without a sustained access to a buzos salary found ways to garner divers' cash, mainly through gifts that divers give to them and by trading sex for cash (see "Earning and Giving Money" in chapter eight).

Household Economies

Living on the coast means living in a cash-oriented world. Besides some subsistence staples, almost all of the household's necessities are purchased in stores. Even families that plant rice and beans up-river sell much of what they harvest for cash to boats and other merchants from outside the region. They then buy their small amounts of rice and beans[7] daily from coastal stores at an inflated rate. Store-bought items are also generally expensive, twice as much as what one pays in bigger Honduran cities. High transportation costs of merchandise to the remote region and price gauging by Ladino merchants are blamed for these elevated prices.

Miskito households depend on both subsistence products and cash to survive. They rely on the crops planted up-river, such as plantains, yuca, rice, beans, various plantains, bananas, corn, chocolate, and fruits. They also rely on trees in their villages for coconuts and other seasonal fruits. Even wealthier households plant and harvest basic crops up-river, or they pay someone to complete these agricultural labors.

Miskito men use slash and burn agriculture for producing crops like yuca, sugar cane, and bananas, and more recently, rice, and beans. While the men typically do the more physically demanding clearing of the fields, the women and children help with planting and harvesting activities. These activities coincide serendipitously with the annual "veda," a legally designated, three-month moratorium (from April to August) on lobster extraction during the breeding season. During this time, the riverine champas are filled with families preparing fields and planting crops. After

the veda, the river empties out again as the men leave for the high seas and families await their return in coastal villages.

The women and children much prefer living most of the year in their coastal villages where they socialize, have access to schools, churches, stores, and health care (including both traditional and western health care), and where they can perform their domestic chores more comfortably. However, a few women stay up-river in champas more permanently, cooking for their fathers or husbands and, along with their children, working the land throughout the yearly round of agricultural duties.

A balance between the coastal and riverine orientations of any given Miskito family is kept through acts of generalized reciprocity. The family members who stay up-river farming and hunting are interdependent with those living on the coast with access to cash economies. These two parts of families depend on each other and exchange resources such as wild game, harvested produce, and fruit from trees up-river with store-bought supplies from the coast. No permanent stores exist up-river and the family members residing there depend on their siblings and relatives for basic commercial items they have become dependent on to survive.

The Plátano Miskito today spend less time on subsistence activities than they used to, due to the expanding lobster industry. Several poor single mothers in Kuri, for example, did not plant at all, claiming to have no husband, brother, or father to help them clear their fields, and no money to pay a hired worker. These women stay

on the coast, living off of what cash they could acquire in gifts from their boyfriends, sons, and brothers in the diving industry. The more desperate and marginalized women even trade sex for cash from divers.

An average Kuri household (around 7 people) spends between L. 35-45.00 (US $3.50-4.50) a day on food items bought at stores, buying meat only once a week for L. 10-20.00 (US $1-2.00).[8] Additionally, mothers buy clothes, school supplies, health care and medicines, and household items like pots, buckets, and knives--not to mention any jewelry, perfume, hair accessories or "luxuries" like maybe a coke, bag of chips, or candy for the children. With the additional costs above basic food stuffs, an average Kuri household spends about L. 1500.00 (over US $150.00) per month. Although some families have savings and larger incomes, most families live from day to day trying to make ends meet.

Women who head households send their children to the store two or three times a day, usually figuring their finances from one meal to the next. Most families eat basic menu items of rice, beans, and plantain, three times a day and some may have fish, crab, tortillas, and coffee. Meals of the wealthier families included meat, eggs, milk, baked bread, spaghetti, tomato sauce, sardines, and instant soups. Meat, mostly purchased along the coast, is the most prestigious item on anyone's plate.

I began to realize that meat (called "huina" or "upan") was a scarce and prestigious commodity in a world of beans and rice. Once cued into this, it seemed as

if meat was the main topic of every conversation (who killed what, where, when, and how much). Prestige was bestowed upon those with the scarce resource.

The local availability of meat serves as important information to be shared between family and friends. I remember once, while travelling up-river in the Las Marías region, as soon as our guide Allen received word that his father had killed a tapir ("tilba"), we left directly for his house. As we pulled up along the river in front of his house, a hundred or so strips of meat were seen hanging on the branches of a fallen tree drying in the sun. Passer-bys in dug-outs gawked at the opulent display of meat. By the time we returned down river, the entire coast had heard about the kill.

Many women complain when others did not share meat and other prized subsistence items. One mother in Kuri told me, "before, whoever had the biggest piece of meat shared." Today, there is little sharing of meat, which is mostly purchased with cash in stores and in spontaneous markets established near to where the owner butchers an animal. Elders remember the days when a neighbor returning from a successful hunt up-river would exchange a portion of meat for a big bunch of "plátanos" or bananas. Now-a-days, Kuka Gladys of Kuri said, "you just hear the people are in their house, but nothing comes." Sharing of subsistence items and forest game has decreased because of the men's ability to make inflated sums of money in the diving industry and because they no longer spend much time hunting.

The Miskito also attribute the decline in traditional sharing behavior to the influx of the cash economy--nobody can afford to give away costly, store-bought

items. But because of the social pressure to share what you had with others, individuals often feel guilty for not being able to.[9] Miskito individuals returning from the store frequently keep their newly acquired goods hidden in back-packs, pockets, or under turbans worn by the kukas; all this to inhibit jealousies and to insure the goods would make it home intact.

Lobster Divers (Buzos) in Kuri

On the cash-oriented north coast of the Plátano Biosphere, the population survives mainly off the earnings provided by the buzos. In the relatively small community of Kuri (population 165, 1997), twenty-nine boys, young men, and mature men in Kuri worked on lobster boats. All men in the community work as buzos or as cayuqueros, except for seven, of which two were Pastors, one a retired schoolteacher, two mainly retired elderly men, and one a tour guide. Not every household in Kuri had access to buzo money, while some had more than two divers under one roof.

6	teenagers
16	in their twenties
3	in their thirties
4	in their forties

Table 7.2 Age of Men Working in Lobster Industry in Kuri, 1998

20	Total # Buzos	9	Total # Cayuqueros
0	teenagers	6	teenagers
14	in their twenties	2	in their twenties
3	in their thirties	0	in their thirties
3	in their forties	1	in their forties

Table 7.3 Age of Buzos (Divers) and Cayuqueros (Canoemen) in Kuri, 1998

Most buzos are in their twenties, while most cayuqueros are in their teens. There is one cayuquero, who is in his forties (Table 7.3), however, this was an anomaly and villagers often joked about this man never having become a buzo. Cayuqueros and buzos were usually related, and worked together, with younger canoemen working with older male relatives, like fathers, brothers-in-law, or uncles. Often, a "tuban"-"tahti" (nephew-uncle) kinship relationship existed between a cayuquero and buzo. These respectful kinship terms are often adopted as terms of reference by many diver-canoeman teams, regardless of their actual relationship.

Most of the inexperienced and younger buzos in Kuri made between two-hundred and three-hundred US dollars (between L. 2,000.00 and 3000.00) on each trip. Because they spent their money partying and womanizing (see chapter eight), the young men contributed relatively little to their households, giving only a few hundred Lempiras to their mothers or wives.[10] However, more mature divers (in their late twenties and older) had already been through their wild days and usually spent their money more wisely.

Twenty-something: A Day in the Life of Alcero, 1991

Alcero, Kuka's "plaisni" (youngest child) was a 27 year old lobster diver. He returned to shore on a Friday and was still "vagando" (roaming around and up to no-good) with his friends on Sunday, the day he always visited his mother's house. Alcero walked into the Kuka's house with a bottle of cheap Rum Plata in his hand. Although Kuka was disappointed about Alcero's career choice and lectured him constantly about the dangers of being a buzo, she willingly accepted the money he gave her. Some buzos, Kuka explained, did not give any to their mothers and spent it all partying. She was grateful for the 300 Lempiras he gave her after every trip and for the smaller amount of his "advans" (advance pay) that he gave her before he left for a trip. This is a small amount compared to what he spends drinking, carousing, and gifting to his wife and other girlfriends. By the end of this day, however, Alcero would be "lala apu" (flat broke).

Kuka told Alcero that he should lay down to take a nap since he had finished his bottle. But Alcero opened another bottle and began swigging it. Kuka started yelling, "put your head down, it's better if you sleep here now." Alcero tried to lie on the bed and close his eyes. Then, he suddenly jumped up and growled, "I have to find a woman." He announced this in front of everyone, including his wife and mother. He continued to rave, "I'm going to Barra Plátano to find a woman." Kuka responded, "you'll be lucky to make it to Utla Almuk." She knew that he could not make it far in his condition and that it was hard to find a dug-out to cross the Plátano River at night.

As Alcero stumbled out of the house and joined his friends, the Kuka stood in the door and yelled behind him, "How can you cross the Plátano half blind?"

Alcero did not return that night. The Kuka's cousin came to her house the next day at sunrise. She told her that Alcero was asleep in her Utla Almuk home. She said that Alcero had made it as far as the next village, took one step into her door, and fell flat on his face.[11]

That afternoon, Alcero re-surfaced at his mother's home to bathe with his pockets empty and a pounding headache. To make matters worse, a pesky "sacabuzo" (an employee of the boat who hires local divers) was following him around, trying to get him to leave for his boat, the Armac III. The sacabuzo was getting on Alcero's already thinned nerves and Alcero decided to give him the slip. He left from the back of his mother's house and successfully escaped for another hour to drink beer with friends on the beach. When the sacabuzo finally tracked Alcero down and approached him, Alcero punched him square on the chin, knocking him out. Then, Alcero got in his cayuco and headed out to the nearest of two boats. He was so intoxicated that he paddled toward the wrong boat, entertaining everyone on shore who, between laughter, yelled to him to paddle towards the other boat.

Thirty-something: Daugoberto, a Real Man and Responsible Buzo, 1998

Daugoberto is Kuka Denecela's grandson and a Kuri buzo in his mid-thirties. He has years of experience diving and no longer wasted all of his cash on booze and

women. He spent a few hundred to a thousand Lempiras partying when he returned to shore, but then gave most of his earnings to his wife, children, mother, sisters, or grandmother. The money being split about equally between his wife and members of his mother's matrilocal group. Daugoberto also has outside girlfriends and a semi-permanent concubine. He claims not to routinely give money to these women. Instead, he waits for a big trip when he earns L. 10-12,000.00 (US $1-2,000.00) and then gives one of them enough money (L. 7,000.00 or US $700.00) to build a house. Daugo said he liked to wait to give big presents because time could tell if a woman was trustworthy. Divers often feared that women took advantage of them for their money (see "Fear of the Feminine" in chapter eight).

Experienced buzos like Daugo are more mature than the younger divers and often use their big earnings to invest in items like cayucos, motors, houses, or cows. Once, Daugo even used the money from a successful diving trip to buy a large quantity of cocaine. He paid L. 8,000.00 (US $800.00) and then sold it to someone in Barra Patuca for double the price. But, he claims never to have done this again because he did not like the work. Daugo does not consider selling cocaine morally wrong, but thinks breaking the law is a dangerous way to make money. Shortly after Daugo returned from Barra Patuca, his concubine paid to have a new house built.

Economics of Kuka Denecela's Matrigroup

Kuka Denecela's matrigroup in 1998 included her households and those of her daughters, Enemecia, Tomassa, Ilabia, Yunipaip, and Delfina. Yunipaip is the daughter of Soledad, Kuka Denecela's daughter who died about twelve years ago. She lived temporarily in Kuri while I completed my interviews. Yunipaip is the only member of the matrigroup included here who was not represented in the social organization data of the matrilocal group.

Monthly Income		Households of Kuka Denecela's Matrigroup
Lempiras	US Dollars	
3,500.00	350.00	Delfina's Household
1,500.00	150.00	Tomassa's Household
1,000.00	100.00	Ilabia's Household
1,000.00	100.00	Yunipaip's Household
800.00	80.00	Enemecia's Household
600.00	60.00	Kuka Denecela's Household

Table 7.4 Monthly Household Incomes of Kuka Denecela's Matrigroup (August - March, 1998).

Results from my household census show income levels ranged from L. 600.00 to L. 3,500.00 within Kuka Denecela's matrigroup in 1998. The larger households with over six people needed L. 1500 or more to meet family needs for store-bought goods;

smaller families generally needed less. These income levels place households, such as those of Tomassa, Ilabia, and Yunipaip, only at a survival level, and those of the Kuka and Enemecia at an even more economically disadvantaged level. Tomassa supports nine children and has a bodega (a shack with a gas-operated cooler) where she sells beer to divers. Ilabia and Yunipaip, with only one and two children respectively, both have access to buzo money, with the former's husband being a cayuquero and the latter's being a buzo. Enemecia, with 8 children in her household and her mother, Kuka Denecela with 4 children, live together in the same house and share agricultural fields up-river in Liwa Raya. They have less access to cash than other women in the matrigroup because neither had a buzo as a permanent household member. Because Enemecia and Kuka have such low household incomes, they cannot survive just on the coast. They must also live off the land in Liwa Raya.

Households	Economic Level
Delfina's Household	above survival level
Tomassa's Household	at survival level
Ilabia's Household	at survival level
Yunipaip's Household	at survival level
Enemecia's Household	below survival level
Kuka Denecela's Household	below survival level

Table 7.5 Economic Stratification of Households in Kuka Denecela's Matrigroup

The household income data (Table 7.4) show that Delfina's household with ten members (1998) is the only one in the matrigroup that earns more than it spends and needs to survive. Delfina, the Kuka's oldest and wealthiest daughter, is married to Professor Sixto George, one of the few professionals in the region.[12] She used his cash base to start a restaurant, bodega, and "trucha" (small store). Mainly she sells beer, rum, and cigarettes to the divers. Her son's cayuco and motor make it possible for her to pick up merchandise for her store via the Margarita cargo boat off-shore. The cayuco and motor are also used in the family's eco-tourism business, bringing one or two tour groups up-river each month (some through a tourist agency in La Ceiba). Delfina now also has a "hospedaje" or tourist house where visitors and eco-tourists can reside. All of the sisters said that Delfina was rich, "lala brisa" (literally, she has money) and that she upset the normal economy based on sharing between the female-based residential group.

The case study of Kuka Denecela's matrigroup[13] shows us how households adapt in diverse ways to the cash-oriented economics of coastal life. By looking at the monthly household incomes, we see that the women who sell goods to the buzos make the most money (Delfina and Tomassa), followed by women who are married to buzos (Ilabia and Yunipaip), and then by women with no access to buzo money (Kuka Denecela and Enemecia). These differences in income stratified the matrigroup, causing some class differences within the local family group. In sum, four of six households in Kuka Denecela's matrigroup operate on money provided by buzos.

My research also showed that even women's households without sustained access to a buzos' salary find ways to gain control of the men's cash and store-bought items. Related women of the local groups often work in coalitions using various strategies to access the buzo resources (chapter eight). Thus, through their agency, women gain access and control of money made by the men.

The pressures brought on by the cash economies cause minor differences to occur in social class between sisters. Because of this, the women of the matrigroup do not frequently share cash or store-bought items. Perhaps when a daughter has extra cash, she'll give what she can to her mother, even if only 50 or 100 Lempiras. Other times, sisters all chip in to help someone pay a fine or to finance a trip for a sick person to travel to a hospital or pay for a healer.

Sharing of subsistence items and meat still occurs within matrigroups. Kuri women who own their own plots of plantains, yuca, or other crops up-river will send their sisters and mother allotments and sell the rest to friends. Because agricultural duties have declined and people plant less, the amounts given to related women and the amounts for sale have both been reduced. Meat-sharing does occur within matrigroups when an animal is killed up-river or when a cow or pig is butchered for sale on the coast.[14] Delfina shares meat when she butchers one of her animals in Kuri; and her father Octavio sends game meat to her when he kills one up-river.

Meat is the most coveted cash item that women of the matrigroup want from Delfina. Even when Delfina's sisters and mother had not eaten meat in weeks, she

sometimes holds out on them to showcase her power. The sisters gossip about Delfina, saying "she keeps the lids on her pots when you visit." Known for being "huba min" (stingy), Delfina even lies to her own adopted daughter Ilabia. One day, Delfina looked Ilabia in the eye and said "huina apu" (there's no meat). All the while, Ilabia could smell the meat cooking and see it on her brother's plate.

Perhaps Delfina acts this way because she knows that her sisters could never reciprocate a gift of meat. They are poorer than her and could not afford to buy meat very often. In further defense of Delfina, she also was extremely generous at times, giving cooked meat to particular friends and extended family members, such as Kuka Lyvian and her daughters from the poorest matrigroup in Kuri; these are the women who most blatantly traded sex for cash with divers.

My case study of a matrigroup in Kuri shows that while reciprocity of subsistence items has decreased, cash and foreign resources are increasingly incorporated into reciprocity networks. The increasing availability of cash has caused a slight breakdown in traditional reciprocity of subsistence items between related people in the village. Women in Kuka Denecela's matrigroup are to the extent possible incorporating more modern resources, like cash, beer, and rum, into their reciprocity networks. For example, Delfina[15] fronts cases of beer to her sister Tomassa to sell. In this way, women of the matrigroup incorporated modern resources into their reciprocity networks, adapting to the market economy.

Cash Obsessions

Every item or service on the coast has a price and conversations centered around their current market prices. When we first arrived in Río Plátano region, we often felt antagonized by local Miskito individuals who used to ask us how much everything we owned cost, where we bought it, and if we would sell it. Sometimes, they would aggressively take stock of our goods, and successively ask us questions about everything we owned. As time went by, I realized that this was not antagonistic or rude behavior directed singularly at us, visitors to the region, but part of a culturally accepted mode of behavior, especially when dealing with highly desired foreign goods. Fetishism for cash and store-bought goods occurs in this remote region. Cash rules the day and merchandise that arrives from the sea and is rapidly depleted in a show of conspicuous consumption that might be comparable to a potlatch (see "Men in Groups," in chapter eight).

The Boom and Bust Mentality

Although the lobster economy has thrived for over thirty years and there have been no major "busts" on the north coast of the Plátano Biosphere, the Plátano Miskito have many mini "bust" situations where they can not access cash and store-bought items. During these times they display feelings of helplessness as described by Helms (1971:224-225). Even when the lobster diving season is in full swing, Miskito divers can get lucky or unlucky on any one trip, bringing in a huge amount of

lobster or next to nothing. This causes temporary "bust" situations to occur in particular households, where individuals who can not access the resources that they so desire become depressed. The theme of hardship and pessimism escalates among the Miskito women when the men leave again. Women complain that without men they are unable to get cash to purchase household items, meat, or male labor needed to tend fields. Women with buzo sons and husbands often borrow money or extend their credit accounts with store owners to tide them over until the divers return. Kuka Lyvian often asked me, "could you lend me a little money and I'll pay you back when the boat comes in." These were depressing times.

Another mini "bust" situation occurs for Río Plátano Miskito individuals when coastal stores sell out of their merchandise and the boats are delayed. Local stores receive merchandise by commercial boats from La Ceiba. Three main merchandise boats arrive every 15 days during the diving season. Boats, like the Margarita that services Kuri and the north coast villages, bring merchandise to stores and particular families along the coast.[16]

When stores have merchandise, people gather, creating a happy social setting. Many come to see what goods have arrived or which diver is buying. Stores display an array of items on their shelves -- powdered milk, oatmeal, brooms, plastic tubs in bright colors, tupper-ware, nails, knives, jamboxes, perfumes, toothpaste, aspirin, and chips, cookies, flashlight, toilet paper, candles, and batteries. Customers gaze longingly at these goods while waiting at the counter to be attended to by the owner.

Store owners try, usually unsuccessfully, to make their inventory last more than a few days. They, like their clientele, want to avoid the sad moment when they must say it's all gone. Many smaller store owners ration out what they have and reserve their right to sell mainly to their family and close friends. However, the store goods inevitably run out and the locals develop, what might be called, withdrawal symptoms from cash and store-bought items and fixate on the Margarita's return. While awaiting the Margarita, Delfina, her sisters, and mother meet every morning near the shore to discuss the probability of the boats' arrival that day. Delfina would say, "naiwa aula" (she's coming today), like an addict hoping for a fix.

The longest mini "bust" situation among the Río Plátano Miskito occurs during the veda or off-season, a four month (April-August) moratorium on lobster diving enforced by the national government. Locals display the most dramatic feelings of helplessness during the veda. No boats bring merchandise and there is little cash on shore when lobster-diving activities are suspended and the men are not working, Downtrodden without money to even take their children to the clinic when sick, families tend to stay in their agricultural camps up-river, living off of the land and counting down the weeks until the diving season begins again.[17]

Río Plátano Miskito individuals have not experienced any major economic "busts" in their life-times. However, the locals do display "boom and bust" behaviors (Helms 1971). There were times during the year, especially during the veda, when goods were not available and individuals became depressed. The yearly cycle of the

"boom" diving season (August-March) followed by the "bust" veda (April-August) season instills a yearly cycle of "boom and bust" behaviors in the locals.

Because of the long term economic "boom" provided by the lobster industry, and because of the increased sums made by lobster divers over the last thirty years, Plátano Miskito individuals have sustained a dependence on and desire for cash and purchased goods.[18] Indeed, their exaggerated longing for cash and store-bought goods borders on the obsessive-compulsive. My research found that Miskito people seemed hopeful when they had cash and store-bought items but were sad when they were depleted (Helms 1971). Plátano Miskito individuals have an obsessive-compulsive behavior surrounding money and store-bought goods and villagers conceptually linked having money and store-bought items to the psychological well being of a person. In fact, many residents along the coast used the terms "sadi" (sad) and "lala apu" (without money) synonymously. Miskito women' s households, and their psychological well-being, then, depend on cash mainly provided by men. Women's desire for cash and store-bought goods, then, heightens men's status and reinforces their "male authority" because they alone have jobs that give them access to cash. Thus, the Plátano Miskito's cash-oriented obsessions reinforced men's power.

Chapters six and seven together show that contradictory gender-power relations exist in the village, where the power that women have in matrilocal groups is countered by the male-dominant lobster economy. Men's access to migrant wage labor mainly establishes their "male authority" along the coast. However, migrant

wage labor has also caused male absenteeism and matrilocality to develop, and, thus, women's high level of "female autonomy." Therefore, the coastal economy has caused an ambiguous gender-power complex to develop in coastal Miskito society, where women's power existed alongside a strong male dominance. Thus, the gender-power complex in the reserve is defined by contradiction--it is characterized by both "female autonomy" and "male authority."

Notes to Chapter Seven

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1. Anthropologists studying acculturation in Latin America formally categorized societies on a pre-capitalist to capitalist continuum as indigenous, peasant, or westernized. These categories do not account for hybridity, nor the post-modern patchwork of attributes of the Miskito economic culture.

2. Mary Helms (1969a) described the Miskito as a purchase society where its members are economically and psychologically dependent on outside market items. She believes that during boom times the locals were happy and during bust times, depressed. However, my research indicates that since the coastal villages were settled a century ago, there has been no true "bust" period in the economic hub of the region.

3. During the 1991, 8-month long season, the lobster industry brought over two million dollars to the north coast of the Plátano Biosphere (Herlihy and Herlihy 1991). In 1997-98, my estimates show the industry grew and generated an estimated 3.2 million dollars in revenue.

4. Some boats from the Patuca region have recently switched to the reserve's north coast. Their Captains reportedly claimed that the Plátano Miskito workers had fewer problems than ones from the Patuca.

5. A ride in the new communal taxi (a four-wheel drive vehicle with an open bed) cost around 20 Lempiras for a three or four mile ride (from Ibans to Río Plátano). Travelling in tuk-tuk (motorized canoe) across the lagoon to Brus Lagoon or Palacios cost around L. 35.00 (US $3.50). Even a child charges one or two Lempiras (15 cents) to cross a passenger to the other side of a river in their canoe.

6. John Comaroff (1987) has recently outline five theses analyzing the political economy of ethnicity which stresses the division of labor.

7. Some wealthier families travel to Ahuas to buy large quantities of beans at bulk rate during the harvest.

8. If a family spends 40 Lempiras at the store for thirty days (L. 1,200.00) and buys meat every week (L. 15 per week), they will spend 1,260 Lempiras per month (around 90 US dollars) just for food. Three regular meals for a family of 6 costs about 40 Lempiras a day, including store-bought beans, rice, lard, salt, coffee, sugar, etc.

9. The Miskito children are socialized to share their smaller items like candy or oranges with friends and siblings and being stingy (slabla) is looked down upon. "Kum aik" (give me one) is often heard when walking with fruit or store bought items; other times, one hears a guilt ridden voice saying "diera aikras" (you give me nothing). Children are considered "kupia saura" (mean) who are seen eating fruit sitting alone and not sharing with another young friend or relative.

10. Tice (1995) also reported that the Kuna lobster divers in Panama's San Blas Islands spend most of their money before bringing it home.

11. Later that day Kuka asked me if I had any pills to make people stop drinking. Her own potions, she said, had failed to cure Alcero's drinking and she wondered what more she could do. She said, "I won't be able to talk to him when he's dead and buried in the cemetery...How am I going to talk to him when he's underground... Then, he won't be able to pass by my house on Sundays."

12. He is now a retired school teacher, draws a pension salary from which he deposits a part in the family bank account in Tegucigalpa. The family also maintain a savings of cash on the coast that serves as Delfina's collateral to pay, partially in advance, for merchandise she orders through the Margarita boat.

13. Kuka Denecela's matrigroup has two women who have gone up-river to live and work off the land, two women who married buzos, and two who sell merchandise and alcohol to buzos. Although women who sell to the divers claim not to like having drunk men in their homes, they also needed money to survive.

14. A butchered cow will produce between L. 1,500.00 and L. 3,000.00 (US $150.00 to 300.00). Locals use their cattle like a savings account where they kill a cow usually to finance a specific endeavor. This often was to pay for a healing ceremony or to take a trip to an outside region.

15. Delfina pays her mother, father, and sister who live in Liwa Raya (the family agricultural and hunting grounds up-river) to work in her agricultural fields, although Delfina also goes up-river herself to work during harvest and planting season.

16. To receive merchandise ordered from a boat, one needs to own or have access to a cayuco or boat with an out-board motor. Individual families may receive materials for building houses or just Coca-Cola, beer, and smaller items like cookies that they will sell from their homes.

17. During the veda, some men switch to caracol or conch diving to carry them through financially until the lobster season begins again. The veda also corresponds to the harvest and planting schedule, the most labor-intensive work in the yearly agricultural cycle. So most men go up-river at veda time, usually with their entire family, to do labor intensive work from March to June before the rains come.

18. Miskito elders have remembrances of the first cokes sold here in bottles thirty years ago and the arrival of the can about three years ago.

Chapter Eight:
Lobster Divers' Songs and the Discourse of Male Authority

In the following three sections, "Travel," "Danger and Death," and "Earning and Giving Money," I use buzo song texts as windows to view the male-dominant discourse of gender ideology on the coast. The songs were recorded on cassette in my home with two local buzos, Wilinton Suarez and Eucevio Guevarra. Translations of the song were completed in the field, from Miskito to Spanish to English . Texts of songs show that the Kuri buzos define themselves as being peripatetic voyagers who travel to and from far off places, risking their lives in the dangerous diving occupation, and being generous benefactors of family and friends, giving money and resources to them. These perceptions of self cause the buzos (mainly men in their twenties) to live like there is no tomorrow, drinking, womanizing, and fighting and giving money away. The buzo song texts are presented within a discussion of each topic concerning buzo self-identity and the making of a Miskito man. All songs are also part of the broader discourse of "male authority" in Miskito society.

Travel

It was the first diving trip of the season. A buzo from Kuri named Ariano waited at my house for his brother and fellow lobster-diver Marian. Ariano told me that Marian lived in Ahuas and would descend the Patuca to Brus and then walk overland to Kuri. This was the same way Ariano had arrived five years ago. Ariano said "Just like the song says, from the big river, I came paddling." He was referring

to a buzo song that he previously had helped me record with Wilinton Suarez and Eucevio Guevarra.

From the Big River/ Awal Tara Wina

I came from the big river paddling
I looked out at the beach
I saw women, I saw boats, I saw children

I came from the big river paddling
I found a boss named Doña Isa
She found me work and I got ready
I got out my cayuco and paddle
and got my back pack ready
From the big river, I came paddling
I'm off to my place of work
from the big river, I came paddling
I passed barras (sand bars at the mouths of rivers),
I saw boats and waves and coconut trees

I came from the big river paddling
I first passed the barra named Brus
The next barra was named Patuca
the last barra was named Caratasca
I came from the big river paddling.

"From the Big River" tells the story of emigration, where men come to the coastal region to work as lobster divers. Many, like Ariano and Marian, came from afar to live without family. Bizmark decided to live permanently in Kuri and became tasbaya taihka (adopted kin) with the Kuka Denecela's matrigroup. The above song also mentions the diving boat's long trek to sea and the barras that the diver passes in his journey. Being a buzo and a Miskito man generally means being well traveled.

Divers travel with their fishing boats outside Honduras to fishing banks in territorial waters of Colombia, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Caymen Islands. Travelling to distant lands brings prestige to the men who return with foreign goods and new life experiences (Helms 1993).

Danger and Death

In Moskitia, being a buzo is more than just a job; it is also a coming of age ritual for adolescent boys. Teen-age boys test their masculinity by becoming canoemen and deep-water lobster divers. Being a "real man" in Miskito society means participating in this dangerous activity. The men challenge themselves by diving dangerously deep in shark-infested waters to kill lobster (Figure 8.1). Although the divers use tanks, the boats do not have decompression chambers on board and many divers get the bends, become crippled or die. The most "manly" men in the eyes of the other adolescent divers are those who venture into deep waters to kill more lobsters and, thus, earn more money.

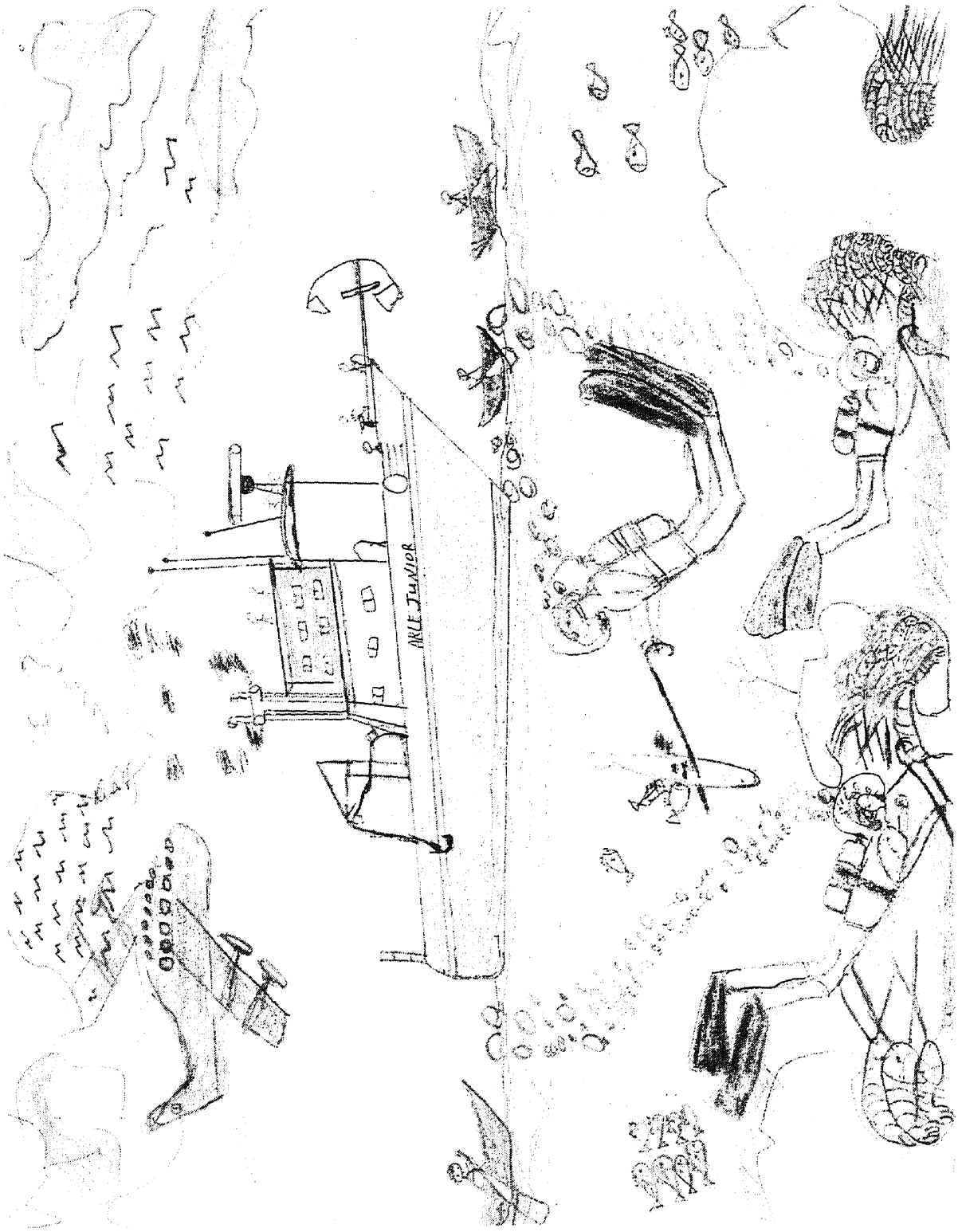

Figure 8.1 Drawing of a Lobster Boat and Divers (by Ariano Bizmark).

Other fishing cultures display similarities with Miskito tests of manhood.[1] In the Truk Island of the South Pacific, the Truk people live mainly from the sea's resources and the men are consummate fishermen. Trukese men, obsessed over their state of manliness, risk death and bodily injury as deep-sea divers who spearfish in small dug-out canoes in deep and dangerous waters inhabited by sharks. Their need to project a macho self-image in society causes them to act bravely and to think "manly" or macho thoughts. If any men are too afraid to go on the spear-fishing trips, the community's women and men belittle them by calling them feminine or infantile. When back on-shore, the Trukese male youths drink excessive amounts of alcohol like the Miskito, fight in brawls, and search for woman to claim as sexual conquests. If the Trukese men do not participate in these "manly" behaviors and activities, they lose their self identity in society and others say that their lives are not worth living (Marshall 1979, in Gilmore1990).

The Kalymnos Islanders in the Aegean sea are also quintessential sea people. They spend much of their time on the water because their livelihood is based mostly on commercial sponge fishing (Bernard 1967; in Gilmore 1990). Similar to the Miskito, Kalymnos men are deep-water divers, but they have refused to adopt tanks and other diving equipment. Manly behavior here is to risk dying or being crippled for life with the bends, and making fun of the weaker men who want to use diving equipment for spongefish diving. In contrast to the Kalymnos islanders, the Miskito use tanks because they insure a larger kill and the ability to earn lots of money is an

integral part of the manhood puzzle in Moskitia. Even with the tanks, however, the Miskito still risk death and injury from the bends (Meltzoff and Schull 1999).

Children, wives, and mothers in Moskitia say good bye to the buzos at the beach. They watch the men and boys, most wearing back-packs, paddle out to sea in small dugout canoes. Their cayucos may turn over more than once from strong coastal breakwater waves crashing over the bow, but the buzos eventually make it to the boat, that then head out to sea, fading from the shore's view. The women and children return to the beach to greet their husbands, brothers, and fathers when they return. Because of the constant threat that one of the buzos will get hurt or die, there are many uncomfortable good-byes. Some divers may have a bad feeling about the trip and will say good-bye in a melodramatic way, like Ariano who would say "it's been nice to know you, and I just wanted to say good-bye in case I don't make it back." Many women shake hands with or hug men while praying out loud for a healthy homecoming.

Since the lobster-diving business began about 35 years ago, local buzos estimate that over 100 divers have been injured, paralyzed, or killed. The men do not like that their occupation is life-threatening, but say, "there's no other hope since we're poor." Mothers all want their sons to work in the fields and hunt. Yet, they have little choice in an economy where they increasingly need cash but find few decent cash-earning opportunities (see Table 7.1). Although mothers fear for their sons' lives, they desperately need what little cash their sons can give them. Kuka Denecela said,

> I don't want my sons to dive, but what can we [the Miskito] do, we need the money. Diving is too dangerous. I already lost one son who died at the bank, and I have two sons who are divers now. What will I do when they go to the cemetery? I won't be able to talk to them. They won't be able to pass by my house on Sunday.

Little boys often imitate the buzos, pretending like they are going off to sea. They often volunteer to help out fetching the divers' paddles and back-packs, dreaming of the day when they would have their own. Presley is an 8 year old boy who heard that the last boat was still waiting off-shore and looking for buzos. Caught up in the excitement of the season's opening, he paddled his cayuco along with a friend to this lobster boat.[2] Presley wanted to be like the big guys, like his father, who he calls a "buzo original" (the real or authentic Miskito divers because he did not use diving tanks.)[3] So, he risked his life by paddling out to sea, further than any 8 year old should have been. While many praised Presley as "kupia karna" (or brave) for paddling out to the boat, his mother Tomassa whipped him warning, "you're gonna die young." The following song demonstrates the theme of death, which pervades buzo songs. Both buzos and musicians, Wilinton and Eucevio, have had brushes with death. Both were injured while diving and temporarily paralyzed. Since their accidents, they now walk with limps and no longer work as buzos. Eucevio now works as a cayuquero and Wilinton, a saca buzo.

Yang Saura Na/ I'm Bad Now

I'm bad now. I'm bad now
I'm bad now. I'm bad now
entering I saw myself
dead in the middle of my paddle
I'm coming from sea
If I had reached twelve days
I'd come back again
I'm bad now. I'm bad now
when I was beginning my twelve day stint
you said to stay, that something bad would happen
now I'm dead

The women were there
the tiaras (teen-age girls) were there
I'm bad now. I'm bad now
I'm not from here
I'm bad now
I'm from the zona (the zone recuperada to the north)
I'm from Suna
I'm bad now'. I'm bad now

Now I'm in the coffin
I'm dead
the women are here
the tiaras are here
I'm bad now, I'm bad now
ini oy, ini oy, ini oy
I'm bad now. I'm bad now

The song tells of a Miskito man at his own wake ("velorio"), placed in a coffin for others to view. The man apparently did not listen to the advice of a woman before he left for sea. She had warned him not to go, but he left and ended up dying. The diver is from a village outside the north coast and his parents did not even know he had died. The song describes a familiar site along the coast, that of a paralyzed or dead diver being lifted out of his cayuco by his paddle, which is used like a stretcher.

Diving is dangerous without a decompression chamber on board, but divers escalate their risk of injury by using drugs (both cocaine and marijuana), both for relaxing and before descending into the ocean's depths. The divers' health is further at risk because they often live in poor conditions on the boats that often frequent illegal waters, traffic drugs between countries, and have problems on board arising from "witchcraft" that divers may use on each other.

The buzos not only participate in a hazardous profession off-shore, but they also participated in a dangerous culture back on the coast. Because there are no banks in the region, men carry around huge amounts of cash (and sometimes cocaine) in their back-packs or pockets. On dark nights, the threat of robbery and murder creates a paranoid and sometimes deadly atmosphere. Suspicious "strangers," perhaps men who emigrated to the coast for work, seem to lurk behind every coconut tree, hut, and beached cayuco. Many buzos carry pistols and knives to protect themselves, arms that may also be pulled out when arguing with others in a drunken stupor.

Mothers and sisters of buzos often walk to the few "disco" bars at night to retrieve their husbands, brothers, and sons. One night I sat with Kuri women outside of the Two-Man Disco in the adjacent village of Utla Almuk. Sitting on an elevated sand dune we could see in the windows and doors of the bar. From here, the women watched for trouble as younger children were sent to follow a buzo while he paid for a round of beers to make sure he did not drop any money on the ground. The children would also alert the women if the buzo was getting into a fight.

Earning and Giving Money

This section looks at how earning and giving money is a fundamental component of the buzo concept of self. I divide this section into three parts, looking at Miskito men's exchange encounters with Others. First I view Miskito men's exchange encounters with 1) members of society in general, 2) between men themselves, and finally, 3) between women and men.

Men in Society

A buzo's manliness is measured by his ability to kill lobster, and thus, earn money. Manliness is also measured by one's level of generosity with others. Those regarded as the most masculine members of society were the divers who killed the most lobster, made the most money, and gave the most away. Miskito divers, after being paid, practiced the ritualized behavior of giving money and goods to others.

Divers give money to their wives, mothers, and sisters whose households depend on this support. They also buy cokes, beers, or other items for family members and friends at stores. Divers with money often draw crowds at stores and they are treated like heroes. Locals may follow them to stores, hoping to receive a coke or more. If not given something, the tag-a-long may get angry and call the diver slabla (stingy) or min (mean). Miskito lobster divers also gave cokes and beers to outsiders to raise their prestige and status among fellow divers. Although I was considered wealthy (a "millionario") because I was a meriki or gringa, one buzo from

the matrigroup even gave me L. 100.00 (US $10.00) for "frescos" (sodas) before he left for the sea. When I tried to give it back, the women scorned me, "keep it, don't insult him." By returning the money, I would have questioned his manhood. Miskito women, children, and elders called men money trees or "lala dusa." Lala dusa is a funny expression similar to the English expression "money bags" that implies the men are only wanted for this reason. The following song (a different version of which was used in chapter seven) illustrates how men see themselves in society.

Money Tree/Lala Dusa

We are who we are
we are the money trees
we work in the big company
we do a big work
we are who we are
we live at the shore of the sea
we are who we are
we live at the sea shore
we are the young men of money
we are who we are

We are the owners of the recife (the lobster banks)
we are the owners of the barranco (underwater ravine)
the young people have fun
the old people enjoy
when the money trees arrive
the tiaras (adolescent girls) are happy
the widows are happy
because of the money trees

We are the owners of the recife
we are owners of the barranco
we are who we are
we are from Moskitia

When a company boat comes to the coast
the women are happy
the widows are happy
when the money trees arrive

The phrase, "we are who we are, we are the money trees" clearly states the relationship between gender role and self identity of the Miskito men--they define themselves largely by their ability to make money and give it away. The song also shows the strong relationship between ethnic identity and occupation because the Miskito are known as being the ethnic group most closely associated with lobster-diving. It also signifies their gender identity, as women are excluded from diving. Indeed, being a buzo is a gender specific job, one that is blatantly exclusive of women, and largely how Miskito men define their masculinity. The songs mention that teenagers, children, spouses, parents, and grandparents are happy when the buzos arrive, showing how the men's funds support all sectors of the population.

The Boom and Bust Self

The Miskito divers defined themselves by two states of being, "being-with-money" and "being-without-money." The divers can get lucky or unlucky on any given trip, bringing in a huge amount of lobster or next to nothing. Even when buzos have good trips, they may spend all of their money in one night partying and wake up broke again. When the men are lala apu (or broke), they feel like losers--they whined and complained about how women only want them when they have money. One

diver commented about his fair-weather girlfriend, "she won't even offer me a plate of rice when I am broke."

Divers have a "boom and bust" concept of self. They define themselves as both rich and poor. An example of this can be seen in two of the most popular buzo songs in the Río Plátano area: "Lala Dusa" (money tree) and "Zero, Man, Zero," (an English expression they use to mean being flat broke) which both describe the divers' concept of self in good and bad times, "boom and bust" stages, happy and depressed states. Below are verses from "Money Tree" and "Zero, Man, Zero" that I collected from Wilinton Suarez and Eucevio Guevarra.

Money Tree/Lala Dusa

We are who we are
we are the money trees
we are who we are
we are the men of the big waves
the elders are happy
the young women are happy
the children are happy
when the money trees arrive

We are who we are
we are the money trees
we are who we are
we are from Moskitia

The following song shows divers are depressed when they are lala apu and have no money to give to their families.

Zero Man Zero[4]

Say hello to my mother-in-law
say hello to my father-in-law
I grabbed my back pack and off I went
to look for the clothes of my woman
to look for the clothes of my children

Say hello to my mother-in-law
say hello to my father-in-law
when I left on the beach, I saw boats
I saw the boats and when I looked up
I saw planes

The first work I found
was work in the boat
after I worked twelve days
I came back with only one pound of lobster
when I made my bill
I had zero man zero

When Isa made my bill
I had zero man zero
they said to bring them a sac of salt
and also to bring a pound of sugar
what can I bring you?
I'm a poor man now

The diver singing these songs tells his family that he's having a bad trip and has not earned much money. All that he can buy for them is one pound of sugar. Divers can sometimes have bad trips and arrive with nothing--or "zero-man-zero"--especially after paying their wives' charges at the store that she accrued while he was gone.[5] He feels badly that he can not provide them with resources. Both "Money Tree" and "Zero, Man, Zero," songs sung by the men, reveal how men see themselves

and how they are seen through the eyes of others--their main role in society is to provide resources that their wives and families desire.

Men in Groups

On lobster boats, the divers stayed in close quarters, slept in dug-out canoes, and dove in illegal waters down twenty meters with no decompression chamber on board. After risking their lives and health for two and a half weeks, a camaraderie developed between divers and the canoemen on board. Men letting off a little steam when back on safe ground referred to their land-loving behavior as vagando (drifting, loitering, or roaming).

When a boat returned, packs of divers with jamboxes, new clothes, bleached hair, and wads of money felt obliged to flaunt their wealth as they roamed from village to village. They commonly walked along the north coast, from Cocobila to Barra Plátano, indulging in conspicuous consumption of cash items including, rum, beer, marijuana, and tobacco. These bouts could last for days after the divers had returned. They loitered in cantinas, stores, or houses where beer and other goods were sold. For many, this continued until most of their money was depleted.

Younger lobster divers, in their late teens and early twenties, most frequently participated in the coming of age ritual called vagando. Arriving back on shore, they roam in groups, drink rum and smoke cigarettes excessively, fight with their fists, knives and guns, and search out sexual liaisons. These are mostly the younger divers

who experience their first taste of manhood, money, and power while carousing or vagando in these all male groups.

Men exchanged their wealth for social prestige within their own diver's culture. They took turns inviting groups of friends to rounds of drinks and smokes. One day during the dry season, I saw a group of young divers taking swigs from a bottle of rum, passing it between themselves. Once the bottle was emptied, a drunk, sun-baked Miskito man with lightened hair announced proudly, "it's my turn to buy the next bottle," and approached the bodega. The store clerk told him that they had drunk all of his inventory. The divers got up and left for the next village to find more booze. The group grew larger as more friends were invited to come along and have a drink. One diver explained, "I have a lot of friends who invite me." Acknowledging that, he added, "after I'm invited, it's a privilege to buy another bottle for the group." He confided in me, "The problem is, I'm invited everywhere I go."

Men and Women

Women gain access to men's cash in various ways. Most local store owners gave credit to responsible divers. When off-shore, the store owner allows the diver's wife to have an open charge account to be paid when he returns to shore. The reputation of the diver usually determines the amount of credit given to the wife. Sometimes, the store owner calls on radio to the boat to verify if a diver is having a good trip or not. The divers themselves also have credit accounts at stores. This

functions as a system of "debt peonage,"[6] especially in the case of a few storeowners who are also boat owners and/or saca buzos (diver foremen or forewomen).

Men also paid women "mairin mana" (literally, women's pay or salary) which refers to the cash exchanged for sexual relations. This is part of the buzos' ritualized behaviors of giving. Miskito men, especially young buzos, give their lovers cash, often exchanging between L. 100-300.00 (US $10-30.00) for sexual relations. A mairin mana encounter may occur in the following way. The buzo may approach the house of a women and knock on the door. The woman might say, "man ya?" (who is it?). The diver would respond only, "yang" (it's me). The man would never says his name in case there was already another man inside with the woman. If a woman is already with another man, she usually says, "go away, I'm sleeping." If alone, she will let the diver in for the night. The diver may slip money under the door before being allowed to enter, but usually gives the woman a gift of cash (mairin mana) when departing. If the diver respects the woman, he will try to protect her reputation and exit before dawn so that no one can see him leaving her house.

The commodification of affection in Miskito society is apparent in mairin mana encounters. However, the locals do not consider these exchange encounters acts of prostitution, although many consider it a "bad habit" or "mal costumbre" in Spanish. Locals consider prostitutes those women who make a living exclusively (or nearly so) by receiving cash for sex, take birth control, have a set price, and get paid only prior to sexual relations. They do not consider women who accept mairin mana

prostitutes because these women normally only partake in these exchanges a few times a month, use no birth control, and attach no set price to sex, usually being given a gift of cash after the sexual encounter. Mairin mana seems to be related to a much more traditional way Miskito women access male labor and resources.

Buzo songs that I recorded also comprise older and "traditional" songs, ones that Wilinton and Eucevio learned from elder divers, male relatives, and their mentor Modesto Morales. The following three songs tell different stories of how Río Plátano men have participated in different labors and economies over the years. The songs all show the primary role of men as cash earners in society. The first song tells of a man who farms in a cash-based subsistence economy; the second involves as a man who carves canoes that he will sell in local markets; the third explains how a man extracts mahogany as a salaried laborer for an international company. Despite the different economic periods the songs may come from, the same gendered division of labor exists between women and men. Men earn money that they give to women.

In the first song, a man involved in cash-based subsistence labors laments his wife wanting to leave him for another man. He sings about how much he loves her and how hard he has worked to provide her with subsistence and cash resources.

Dahlin Painkira/Beautiful Darling

Beautiful darling
This arm will be your yuca field
this arm will be your "platu" (banana) field
this arm will be your "sika" (banana) field

Beautiful darling
this arm will be your house
this arm will be your money
this arm will be your clothes

Beautiful darling
your brother destroys
other people's clothes
your brother destroys
other people's money
your brother destroys
other people's houses

Beautiful darling
you'll forget the guy who was your money
you'll forget the man that was your house
you'll forget the man that was your farm

Beautiful darling
are you going to abandon these clothes?
are you going to abandon these clothes?
are you going to abandon these clothes?

Beautiful darling
this arm will be your orchid
this arms will be your bean field
this arm will be your yuca field

Beautiful darling
are you going to abandon these clothes?
are you going to forget these clothes?
did you leave these clothes outside?

The man singing sees his wife's brother as a homewrecker that spoils his dream that he and his "beautiful darling" would build a life together. A woman's brothers and family, in general, may try to break up a marriage if they do not approve of the woman's husband. The man singing the song does not want his wife to leave him. He is involved in subsistence production and is reminding his wife of all the resources he provides for her. He wants to make her think about what she is throwing away by leaving him. The clothes the man refers to are his own. A sure sign that a spousal relationship has ended is when a woman ceases to wash a man's clothes.

In verses from the next song presented below, "Arelita Mairin" (literally, "Arelita Woman"), Río Plátano Miskito patterns of social and economic organization are described, where men leave the village to earn money that women ultimately control. The man in the song goes off to the forest to build a canoe, so he can sell it to give money to Arelita. This demonstrates the monetized relations between women and men and how men historically have made money specifically to be given to women.[7] Canoe-making has been an historic and modern-day Miskito wage-earning activity, one for which the neighboring Tawahka peoples are today better known (Mc Sweeney 2000). While only a few young divers in Kuri carve canoes for cash, Wilinton, Eleceo, and their friends can more than relate to the classic Miskito social and economic patterns (especially the gendered division of labor) expressed in the song, "Arelita Mairin."

Arelita Mairin/Arelita Woman

Wait for me for a day or two
I'm going to the river
I will stay for weeks
I will stay for months

Arelita woman
I will be away for weeks
Arelita woman
I'm entering the monte (forest)
I'm going to make cayucos (round-bottom canoes)

Arelita woman
I have two or three cayucos
Arelita woman wait for me
this cayuco is your money

I passed the time there,
and then went back again
Arelita woman wait for me
this cayuco is your money
Arelita woman, wait for me
Arelita woman you are looking at me

Below, verses from another version of "Zero Man Zero" (a song presented in chapter seven) tells of a man who is left with no money, after paying for his wife's dental bills at the company where he worked extracting mahogany.

Zero Man Zero

When your tooth's rubber came off
it was the first to break
after they told me about your tooth,
I went to get you
I took you to the mahogany ("yulu") company
when I made my bill
I had zero man zero

When you said to put it (the tooth) back in
I took you to the mahogany company
I took you here
and when I made my bill I had nothing
zero man zero

Today, Miskito lobster divers travel off-shore on vessels for up to two weeks at a time while being absent from their villages. While Miskito men made the money, women gained control over it in various ways. Most often men gave women gifts of money they called mairin mana or a "prisant" (present or gift). Once the money passed from male to female hands, the money enters a "no man's land" of the strictly female domain of household cash. This is a strong belief that a present is, indeed, a present, and once given, it is the recipients to do with what she wanted; it is not a loan, it is her personal property. Indeed, divers did not usually inquire at all about how women spend the money they give them, because they would be considered un-manly for meddling with the day-to-day running of the household. Also, men and women usually kept their finances separate and claimed not to know about their spouses current economic profiles.

The three Miskito songs in this section showed that Río Plátano men historically have had access to wage labor for earning money that they give to women. Miskito women ultimately control their husbands and boyfriends' resources. Therefore, mairin mana (the exchange of cash for sex) seems to be a modern-day manifestation of a traditional system of monetized exchange encounters between Miskito men and women.

Fear of the Feminine

Buzo songs also display men's fear of female sexuality. The songs presented in this section discuss how everyday women in Kuri are promiscuous and cruel, telling how they mistreat men. Men considered women treacherous because they have outside love affairs, desert them, and even kill them. The following song discusses how a diver fell in love with a woman named Minerva after returning from sea. He spent his money partying all night and giving it to her. In the end, Minerva betrayed him and chose another man to sleep with that night. The diver ends up penniless, heartbroken, and hung over. Eucevio's song was semi-autobiographical based on a true story. The woman named Minerva had been seen naked asleep in the tall grass in Kuri that morning and everyone had heard about it. That night, at my house, Eucevio spontaneously wrote "Minerva Mairin" while playing around on the guitar and singing. Many villagers laughed out loud when they heard the song playing from my jam-box and would later congratulate Eucevio on his pretty and witty song.

Minerva Mairin/ Minerva Woman

I'm returning from the sea
I got up on the beach
I saw many women
out of these I found one that I fell in love with
at the creek's shore I asked her name
they told me the name of the girl,
her name was Minerva,
she was the beautiful Minerva

When I was walking with Minerva
I walked with her by her side
to the patio of "Aqui Me Queda Latkara" (a cantina)
I saw men and women entering
and I spent all of my money for Minerva
the beautiful Minerva, the pretty one

And I walked with Minerva
and went to Two Man (a discotheque/cantina)
I entered and inside were many women
and from them I chose one
it was only Minerva that I liked the most
beautiful Minerva
my little pigeon, my little flower
out of all the women, I could only see you
I liked the way she walked and the way she talked
Minerva the beautiful woman

When the sun began to rise
I was in the patio of Two Man
Minerva picked up another man
and was still with him at daybreak
I am in the patio of Two Man
underneath the uva (grape) tree and you see me here
it was only Minerva that I wanted to pick up
another man will only do you harm Minerva
Minerva, you are the most beautiful of all the women
and I love you so much
Minerva woman

The next day I came back to the house
I didn't have even one Lempira
not even a cent
and a hangover that is killing me
you did me wrong
Minerva woman

Young divers sometimes get so drunk that they spend or lose all of their money in one night. They wake up broke again, and await the next boat out to earn

more cash. These situations often involved a woman. Because divers were known for having money, they feared that women only liked them for their money. Many of the diver's fears were well-founded and women often claimed they did not want a man in the house when he did not have money.

A verse from a song, "Sirpi Luhpi Mairin" (literally, "Little Bitty Woman"), that appeared in chapter seven also shows the theme of women betraying men.

"little-bitty woman
only for you I came to your land
but only bad things you did to me
and so I went back again
little-bitty woman"

Below, the song, "Ibilita Mairin" (Ibilita woman) tells of a man's distrust of women.

Ibilita Woman/Ibilita Woman

You'll be over here or you'll be over there
Ibilita you'll be looking at me
in a while you'll hear the sound of an aka (AK 47 rifle)
in a while you'll hear the death of a young man
in a while you'll hear the sound of the hammer
Ibilita you'll be looking at me
you'll be over her or you'll be over there
Ibilita you'll be looking at me

When a big squall came, I came by the house
when I passed, I felt your tears
Ibilita you'll be looking at me
when the women cry, they're lying, don't bury me
the women's tears are lies, don't bury me
while my mother's not yet here, don't bury me
Ibilita, you'll be looking at me

You're going to bury me
Ibilita you're looking at me
Ibilita woman from Kuri

You'll be over here or you'll be over there,
Ibilita it's you whose looking at me
before twenty-four hours have passed, don't bury me
before the strangers have arrived, don't bury me

My mother was crying and scraping her head
crawling on her knees with grief
Ibilita you're looking at me
I hear the bell toll for whom they will bury
you're gonna bury me--who are you going to bury?

You'll be over there or you'll be over here
where are you going to be?
Ibilita women you are looking at me
Ibilita women, woman from Kuri

The man sings, "when the women are crying, they are lying." He believes that his girlfriend or wife wanted him dead so much that she was burying him before his "velario" (wake) ends. The man pleads with her not to rush to burial and to wait at least the traditional 24 hours, or at least until his mother has arrived. Sexuality is linked to death and women are often seen as bringing harm and death to their men.

Menacing Mermaids

Men not only distrust women because of their sexual promiscuity, but also because they fear the supernatural "liwa mairin" or mermaid. The liwa mairin is the most important Miskito spirit or "lasa." She is part goddess and part devil and is the "dawanka" (creator and owner) or "li dawanka," which means the creator and owner

of all bodies of water and water life, including flora and fauna. The liwas[8] are the wealthy owners of all the water resources, from sea, rivers, lagoons, and canals in Moskitia.[9] These water spirits have lavish homes, jewels, riches, yachts and speed boats underneath the water. Barrett (1992:347) explains:

> Liwa mairin is the guardian of the waters. She is the fish herder, and may become angry if you take too many fish. She traps unwary fishermen and travelers, sometimes taking them for her mate. She can turn over a small boat and drown its occupants, whether in the river, lagoon, or in the sea. She can lead you away by deception, especially during a storm, and may never return you to your home. Liwa mairin is also blamed for many illnesses, and is especially suspected in cases of prolonged illness, chronic weakness or anorexia.

The origin of the liwa in Miskito mythology and folklore probably dates to colonial times in Moskitia. There are obvious similarities between the liwa mairin and the mermaid legends espoused by pirates and buccaneers that hid out on the Miskito Coast during the 16-18th centuries. Ethnographic accounts by pirates of the period, such as Esquemeling (1981), De Lussan (1930) and others, report that they hid their vessels in the many inlets and lagoons on the Miskito Coast. Here the vessels escaped attacks from Spanish and British ships. Traditionally, pictures of mermaids were often painted on the sides of pirate and buccaneer ships; and in many of the orations used to concoct remedies to cure liwa sickness, pirate paraphernalia such as "paip glas" (spy glass or telescope) are mentioned. Given this history, it seems the mermaid, especially the blonde-haired, white-skinned mermaid with a human torso and fish tail, probably came from the European tradition. Barrett[10] (1992:347) argues:

> that the term Merry Maid derives from the English Mermaid, and has linguistic and mythic roots in Sirens of Greek Mythology. Identification of the Spanish sirens as Merry Maid and the occasional description of Liwa Mairin as having a woman's body with a fish's tail give evidence for this argument.

However, a combination could have occurred between the indigenous and European tradition. Some South American ethnographies in the Peruvian Amazon and the coastal Guyanas mention water spirits. Michael Brown[11] (1986:52) reports:

> Tsugki, whose home is at the bottom of the whirlpools and rapids of great rivers such as the Maranon...The Aguaruna's first contact with this being is described in a myth, which explains that an attractive woman (variously described as Tsugki or Tsugki's daughter) once lured a man to her home in the depths of the river...(she) wreaked vengeance by means of a terrible flood and an army of Dolphins and anacondas.

The water spirits in the Peruvian Amazon, like in Moskitia, are sexual beings and take people to live with them underwater to be their spouses.

Among the Warao (Surinam Maroons), ethnographer Suarez described (in Price 1993:xix) the water spirit named "nabaro":

> Menstrual blood, in addition to embodying *hebu* [a supernatural force] in its negative and harmful sense, attracts the nabarao, the river inhabitants who, driven by a predilection for menstruating women, abduct them and carry them off as wives to their homes at the bottom of the water. The Warao often identify the *nabarao* with Dolphins (Inia geoffroyensis), which inspire in them great fear. For this reason, menstruating women refrain from bathing in the river, and during their periods wash instead in small pools in the forest, close to the house of seclusion.

The liwa, like the "nabarao" and the "Tsugki," is no benevolent goddess. She punishes those who over exploit her property, bringing locals harm and doom, and causing an endless list of skin problems, illnesses, and death. The mermaid is mother nature's more sadistic and sexy younger sister who taxes greed. The liwa kills or make people sick who exploit or extract too many of her resources, like fish and turtles up-river or lobster, conch, and shrimp at sea. Men, especially lobster divers, are at special risk because they extract the greatest amount of resources from nature.

The divers often buy a sika so that they have good luck on their dive and make lots of money, but, they must beware. Sika is a double-edged sword and having good luck killing lobsters may be the cause of your death. This built-in system of conservation, where taking too many resources causes illness and death, acts as a check on greed. It also shows the relationship of reciprocity with the environment that the Miskito have built into their belief system.

Divers also believe they can are make deals with the mermaid. Many claim that a diver can exchange a life of a child for a big kill of lobsters. They claim this occurs in the following manner: the liwa asks the diver to bring her a pair of the child's underwear or a small garment, which he is to leave on a rock at sea. The garment represents the child's "lilka" or soul that she wants to possess. Some lobster divers have seen other divers, in dire need of money, take a pair of a child's underwear with them in their back-pack to the boat. They say that by the time the diver had returned to shore, a child (a stranger to the village) had already died.

Liwas or water spirits have various manifestations. They live in different types of water-ways and even have a different race, ethnicity, age, and gender. There are numerous liwa mairin pihinis (white mermaids) and liwa waikna pihinis (white mermen) as well as liwa waikna siksas (black mermen) who have children of all ages. These black and white liwas are further distinguished by living in salt, fresh, and brackish water. When the water spirit is spoken about in daily conversations, however, Miskito people just use the term liwa. The Miskito claim that the liwa has beauty rare and looks like a meriki (Anglo) with long blonde hair and has a body that is half fish and half human (Figure 8.2). Thus, the blonde-haired, white-skinned mermaid is the linguistically unmarked category of liwas. When any other liwa is mentioned, locals distinguish it by sex and also color. Each liwa can cause the same general illnesses and reactions in people, but also cause specific reactions depending on the race, age, and sex of both the liwa and the afflicted person. Most commonly, liwas affect people of the opposite sex and of the same general age category. Thus, their interactions with humans are inherently sexualized.

Men and Mermaid Sickness

The most traumatic sickness the liwa causes among the coastal Miskito population is the bends, a sometimes fatal disorder that is marked by neuralgic pains and paralysis, distress in breathing, and often collapse and that is caused by the release of gas bubbles (as of nitrogen) in tissue upon too rapid decrease in air pressure

after a stay in a compressed atmosphere—also called caisson disease and decompression sickness.[12] A conspicuous number of men on the coast walk with limps, crutches, or ride in the few available wheel chairs. When divers are asked what caused their paralysis, they look down and say only one word, liwa. Young men are in a constant battle with the liwa because, as the owner of all resources from the sea, she may get angry at any minute and paralyze them while lobster diving. When diver's are sick and have the bends or decompression problems everyone agrees that they are being punished for killing too many spiny lobsters, and thus, angering the liwa.

There are other symptoms of "liwa siknis" (Mermaid sickness) in men besides those seen in cases of the bends. Men with liwa siknis may have pain in the groin area when urinating or secretions from the penis. Because men and women with liwa sickness both reported secretions from their sex organs, one type of liwa sickness may be related to a sexually transmitted disease. The Miskito themselves also link this type of liwa sickness to the sexual domain. They believe that the liwa causes sickness in humans by entering their groin area from underneath the water when locals are bathing or swimming in nearby rivers and lagoons.

Sleeping with the Enemy

Locals describe the liwa mairin as a supernatural femme fatale. They claim she is a deceptive lover who uses her beauty and wealth to seduce, kidnap, rape, and kill men. Kuka Denecela explained that the liwa seduces men in the following stages:

Figure 8.2 Drawing of the Mermaid (by Esmeralda Saession).

she gets to know them in a river, lagoon, or the sea, begins "visiting" them at night, and then tries to kidnap them, stealing their soul and taking them away from the human world. She warned that if the liwa mairin likes a man, she will eventually take him away to live as her husband in her lavish, underwater home filled with riches.

Liwa sickness is usually diagnosed in individuals who see the water spirits in their dreams or who have a nightly dream that an attractive person is making love to them. Someone diagnosed with the disease is said to be being "visited," "bothered," "molested," or "raped" by the water spirit who, during nightly visits to their bed, has sexual relations with them. While the person may believe it is just a dream, the Miskito believe that the spirit is really there having sex and raping them. When the person awakens, they usually report being sweaty and still aroused. The liwa sometimes leaves physical proof of love-making, such as bruises or red marks on their bodies. Having liwa sickness, then, is a powerful statement of a person's sexuality (Dennis 1997, personal communication).

Although dreams and marks on the body may vary, the interpretation does not: a spirit is trying to possess the person. Thus, Claudia Garcia (1996a:123) classifies liwa sickness as spirit possession. She (1996a:124) found:

> The spirits appear as humans, in most cases white or black, but not Indian, and almost always the opposite sex to that individual. They are the ones who initiate relations with the person. The Miskitu say that the spirits act this way because they like the person and want him or her for themselves. In other words, the spirits overpower an individual because they have fallen in love and want to take the person with them"...."The content of all the testimonies gathered is so similar that it permits an insight into the essence of spirit-individual relations, in which there is an explicit amorous possession that restricts in the majority of cases, the normal life of a couple and family in favor of the spirit-individual relationship.

Men often reported that they had dreams of a gringa or Meriki with long blonde hair walking along on the beach, inviting them to walk with them. This, of course, was no "tourista," the Kuka said, "but the liwa mairin trying to seduce them." *Seeing* a light-skinned, blonde Meriki in person or in one's dreams was a bad omen: a sign that illness and death would come to the man on his next diving trip. Divers who "see" gringas may become so spooked that they disappear with their advance payments, live on the lamb, and refuse to leave shore, risking having their employment terminated by that boat Captain.[13]

The liwas take on human form in dreams and may even appear as a friend or person of the same sex. The coastal Miskito claim that the liwas do this in order to keep their identity a secret and trick their victim. Kuka Denecela insisted that the liwa is smart and appears in a physical form that will be pleasing and not threatening. In sum, the person who comes to have sex with you in the dream does not always

appear as a liwa. They may look like a lover, a friend, or a stranger, but it is really the liwa in human disguise.

Men viewed women as abusers, traitors, and manipulators because of their ability to access their resources. Men did not trust the women and complained that they slept with other men and used them all for their money. Thus, not only were the men afraid of women's promiscuity , but men distrusted women in general. The men, especially the divers, also feared the wrath of the most important Miskito female goddess, the liwa mairin. Understanding the men's fear of the supernatural mermaid and everyday women's sexuality is essential to understanding what being a Miskito man means in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve; it also largely determines the ambiguous gender-power complex in Miskito society. Women's agency was manifested in human and goddess form and female sexuality caused emasculation, sickness, and death to the men. This may suggest that men's fear of women's sexuality reinforced "female autonomy " in their women-centered coastal villages.

Buzo songs show elements of the male-dominant discourse of gender ideology along the coast. However, this is only half of the story. In the next chapter we will see another discourse, one used by women in more private contexts, that contests and largely counters the more public discourse of "male authority" surrounding the lobster diving economy.

Notes to Chapter Eight

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1. Becoming a lobster diver as a male rite of passage in the RPBR. Miskito boys are raised by their mothers and maternal aunts and grandmothers in matrigroups with few men present on a daily basis. Going to sea to work on lobster boats as a teen-ager is the first real individuation that boys have from their mother and other female members of the matrigroup. In some societies boy perform great acts under the guidance of a male mentor to achieve manhood. Murphy (1974) and Jackson (1975) argue that in societies where women participate in subsistence activities this is not the case. Post-Freudian analysis has shown (Gilmore 1990; Gregor 1985; Murphy 1956) the separation from a female identity may be especially dramatic for boys in matrifocal cultures, where family units are mother-centered.) This may cause more of an intensified individuation from women in Miskito society than in those with other types of kinship and domestic organization.

Thomas Gregor (1985) regards gender and sexuality as similar cross-culturally. Boys in many cultures must pass a test of manhood. Gilmore (1990:9-29) finds in all kinds of societies from low-tech (subsistence and fishing) to high-tech (urbanized), from warring to peaceful, manhood tests are similar. He claims that the idea is that men are crafted or made, not simply born; and that womanhood is thought of as more biological. Among the Amhara of Ethiopia (Levine 1966:18) and tribes of New Guinea (Herdt 1982), boys are taken away from mothers and put through a series of brutally masculizing rituals such as whipping and flailing before being admitted to manhood. Among the Masai and New Guinea Highlanders, both fierce warrior people, manhood is associated with fighting. Boys are sent away in age-groups and faced with trial by ordeal to pass to a social state of manhood. However, in more peaceful groups like the Bushman, boys hunt to become men. Indeed, Gilmore (1990) shows that manhood rituals are widespread among a diversity of culture groups and he cites the Fox North American Indians of Iowa (Gearing 1970), Latin American peasants (Lewis 1961), among the Balkans (Simic 1969, 1983); Moroccans (Marcus 1987:50); Bedouins (Abu-Lughod 1986), and Christian Crete (Herzfeld 1985:15).

2. Prelsey imitates the older buzos in many ways. He claims to have paid a young girl, a little older than he is, to have sex with him even though he is only eight years old an nowhere near puberty. He bragged that he paid half the cost that the older guys pay. Some of the buzos heard about this. They promoted and encouraged Presley, giving him accolades and lending him more money. The older buzos and mentors of cayuqueros (around twelve or thirteen years old) often paid older women around 12 or 13 years of age often paid older women in their twenties and thirties to sleep with them to the delight of the older guys. The precocious Presley, however, was not yet a cayuquero and had no buzo mentor. In fact, he had no father figure in his life and his mother raised him with his one older brother and eight older sisters. Only one adult

male lives in Presley's whole matrigroup. Perhaps because of the absence of adult men in his life, Presley feels it necessary to do a great deed and separate from the women of his matrigroup by dramatically displaying his manhood pre-maturely.

3. The buzos that did not use tanks in the old days were thought to be the most manly. They caught more lobster when the industry just began. However, they did not need to go down as deep to catch the lobster.

4. Other words for being broke besides "zero" are "apu" meaning there is none, "lala tikan" which means lost or blown money, and "dahn" which means the money's ended.

5. The song's refrain is "*Daipnara* audi wis, *sukurira* audi wis, umpira sna na, dia lika blikamni" ("send my best to my wife's father and my wife's mother, I'm a poor man now, what can I send to you?"). This reveals the matrilocal post-marital settlement patterns [through the kinship terms daipna (ones' wife's father) and sukuri (ones' wife's mother)] that exist and how divers support their wife's family's residential group.

6. Dean (1994, 1995) observed a similar structure of debt peonage among the Urarina of the Peruvian Amazon.

7. Siskind (1973) reported among an Amazonian tribe, that women traded sex to get meat and other resources from men and traders. The same structure may have existed historically among the Miskito. Cash has always been a male resource that women gained access to and control of through strategies. In Amazonian societies, hunting was the men's main gender role and occupation. On the Honduran Coast, related Miskito women often help each other to access men's resources; however, money, instead of meat, is the primary resource they desire.

8. The liwa mairin provides a good example of how religious syncretism works among the Miskito. While Pastors argue that God is the creator of the sea and all her plants and animals, the indigenous Miskito ideology maintains that the water spirit does this. Pastors explain and denounce the liwa mairin in terms of the western Protestant Moravian world view, claiming that the liwa is a fallen angel who once worked with God but who now works with the devil. Nevertheless, even the profoundly Christian Miskito people believe in the water spirit and her status as a good-turned- evil spirit.

9. Barrett (1992:347) says the Liwa is called "sirena" in Spanish, the "Merry Maid" in Creole English, and by various terms in Sumu, including "was dawanka," "was muhiney," "was sirawka," "was muihka," and "was dika."

10. (See also mermaid folklore in Trinidad and Tobago).

11. Brown (1986) cites various others who have described Tsugki.

12. This definition comes from Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2002.

13. The recent appearance of second hand clothes for children in Moskitia with the picture of Walt Disney's "The Little Mermaid" frightens some locals. Likewise, they are also frightened by real life gringas that come to the coast, many of who they consider to resemble the mermaid goddess with blonde hair and light skin The very sight of a tourist frolicking in the water just as a diver is supposed to push off to sea may cause him to reconsider his departure.

Chapter Nine: Incantations and the Discourse of Female Autonomy

Plátano Miskito speakers use the word sika to refer to all types of cures and medicines (Dennis 1988, House and Sánchez 1997), including pills, a medicinal or supernatural plants or any concoction used to cure psychological, spiritual, or physical illness (Barrett 1992, Fagoth et al. 1998, Garcia 1996a, URACCAN 1997). Sika can be most broadly defined as a sub-surface control system that resolves psychological and spiritual discords and cures physical illnesses in Miskito society, often by using plants, natural and man-made materials, and other techniques such as steam baths, reciting orations, or rubbing the skin.[1] Sika in general, and praidey saihka in particular, are part of the most highly guarded secrets of Miskito traditional culture. The Kukas pass down highly guarded secrets of sika to their daughters and granddaughters. Praidey saihka, the most secretive sika, is believed to control relationships with other people. Once used for love, women now mainly use praidey saihka for economic reasons, especially to access money and gifts from the male lobster divers. The use of praidey saihka is a widespread but little documented part of Miskito culture.

Healing and Sexual "Magic"

Miskito women use the term "praidey saihka" (literally Friday's medicine) to refer specifically to potions that manipulate emotions and relationships. This is because they make potions mainly on Fridays, which is the "holy day" and best day

for calling on supernatural plant powers. Local women also use the term "winsday saihka" (Wednesday's medicine) because Wednesday is another ritualized day when these potions are made. Women may also use the term "waikna saihka" (man's medicine) to refer to the intended recipients. Following traditions, women extract the plant part used to make the potion at mid-day on Fridays and Wednesdays, when women can be found in the bush patches growing around their homes, the lagoon, and on the savanna. Secretively, they cut plants with kitchen knives and put them in pieces of cloth, plastic bags, or hide them in their skirts.

To make praidey saihka, women recite orations, sing special songs, dance, and use ritualized movements, such as blowing air from their mouths rhythmically, and various other techniques. Different plant parts--seeds, flowers, stems, stalks, leaves, or roots--are smashed, torn, or left whole. Women put these plant parts in perfumes, foods and drinks (especially teas), water for bathing, steam baths, liquids for rubbing on a person, or simply place them in a particular location in a house. Recipes and ingredients used to make praidey saihka vary widely and are passed down through the female line. Mothers usually teach family recipes to their daughters.[2]

The women first pay the plants,[3] putting money in the soil around the roots of the plant to call forth its "magical" powers. They claim that they must pay the plant if they want the plant to listen to them and once it is "listening" to them, the women recite an incantation to coerce the plant's spirit to act on their behalf.[4] Then, the women extract a part or all of the plant.

The theme of money also pervades the knowledge and use of sikas. The women respectfully pay the plants to make these potions, but they use them to gain cash from men and other women. The small payment women make to the roots of the plant, then, is a good investment that should yield a financial return. Those women skilled in praidey saihka production can contribute significantly to household incomes, with some potions being relatively expensive (L. 100-300.00 or between US$ 10-30.00). Other women buy them along the coast and seek out the women who are known for specializing in the particular sika they want. Typically, younger women buy them from older ones who have become specialists in certain sikas. Families are associated with certain sikas.

Types of Praidey Saihka

Women use several classes of praidey saihka to control men, access their cash, and subvert their power. Some of the more commonly used praidey saihka potions are accompanied by verses of incantations. These texts are parts of much longer incantations that women use to gain access to men's resources. Five classes of praidey saihkas are discussed below to illustrate the women's participation in a more female-dominant discourse. Thus, women negotiate between two different discourses of gender ideologies, the male-dominant discourse surrounding the buzo industry and the female-dominant discourse surrounding praidey saihka.

Yamni Kaikan and Ailihkan

Miskito people frequently use a love potion called "yamni kaikan" to manipulate others into loving or liking them. Incantations sung by the women making the potion tell of the concoction's ability to attract men, women, elders, children, and even dogs (see text below). Women most often use the love potions to charm lobster divers into giving them cash or presents like food or clothes.

Love Yumuh/Yamni Kaikan Yumuhka

Love potion you
love potion you
at the minute a man sees me
at the moment a child sees me
at the moment a women sees me
at the moment a dog sees me
at the moment an animal sees me
everybody, the whole town, love
at the four corners of the place, love
today I pray to you
at the moment an animal will see me, it will faint
love potion yumuh
today I pray to you

Ailihkan is very similar to yamni kaikan in its powers to attract but it focuses mainly on men. Women use ailihkan to seduce one particular man and garner his resources. Another love potion, called stand-by has power to coerce a man into being attentive to a woman's every need. This sika must be used with caution, according to local experts, because the man becomes so attached that he will not let the woman out of his sight, even following her to the bathroom! Women consider this highly

undesirable and value their free time away from their husbands to kirbaia (to promenade or to go out socializing) with other female friends and relatives.

Kupia Ikaia and Kaiura Ikaia

Kupia ikaia (literally "to kill the heart") is a Miskito potion that prevents men from being jealous of their wives. The potion even makes men do household chores while their spouses have trysts with other men. Thus, kupia ikaia provides a woman with the opportunity to have it all--a husband, a boyfriend, and access to both of their resources (see text below). In all of the incantations that mention names of male and female parties involved, the woman will be called Nora and the man, Natalio.

Anti-Jealousy Medicine or Old House

You old house
Natalio will not get mad at Nora when they talk
in the future, he won't get mad
you old house
you medicine (sika)
when the south wind blew
you took away the anger
in the wind leaving the land
the sea winds blew and it passed
Natalio won't be mad
a big squall comes and grabs you and then releases you
like you won't get mad
a big hurricane grabs you to the end
destroying and almost killing you
beneath you a frog entered with out getting angry
you will not get angry at Nora
today this spell takes hold

"Kaiura ikaia" means to kill the yuca. Yuca is a metaphor for the male penis. This praidey saihka takes away a man's virility (see text below). Women use it to prevent their spouses from having infidelities. Although a man will still be able to have sex with his wife, this sika prevents him from being with other women. Even if he feels attracted to a beautiful woman, when the hour comes to have sexual relations with her, he will not be able to attain an erection. Knowledge of how to concoct both kupia and kaiura ikaia potions are highly guarded secrets among Miskito women. Those who control the knowledge of these sikas are considered especially threatening and treacherous females.

Old Eggs (Testicles) Yumuh/Almuk Mahabra Yumuhka

Old person, lots of years testicles you
when Natalio takes his out for a woman
it will go down like a grandfather 100 years old
he will be able to do nothing
it will be too mature and worn
you old person yumuh you
grandfather shrinking out yumuh you

Misbara

"Misbara" is a hate potion that deludes a man or woman into abandoning his or her home. When a woman desires to live with an already married man, for example, she may use misbara to steal him away from his wife. The incantation accompanying the potion explains how the potion will manipulate the man into

despising his home and physical surroundings to the point that he has to leave. The Miskito often associated hate with a bad smell (see text below).

Hate Potion Yumuh/Plais Misbarka

Place hate potion you
dead people hate potion you
touch hate potion you
to Natalio, this place Kuri stinks
and makes him run with fear
to Natalio, this place Kuri stinks
like a dead person on their third day
alligator dead, a bad smell
a stinky smell is brought
you will run from Kuri
you will run from this place
place hate potion you
after people die and are buried
you will go away the same way
you will not return to Nora ever again
death, hate potion you, today I pray to you

A few women were known for using yamni kaikan (love potion) on a man to attract him during lobster diving season and misbara during the veda or bust season. Misdina and Benli had two children and had been in an on again off again relationship for eight years, since Benli first "married" her when she was a young teenager. Misdina used yamni kaikan on Benli to seduce him during the diving season when he had money and then used misbara on him to make him leave her during the veda when he was broke. Every year the same pattern repeated itself. Villagers sat in their patios, trying not to laugh, when Benli clad with suitcases and his clothes headed to

Misdina's house just before the first diving trip. This was just in time for the young and beautiful Misdina to get money from his advans (advance pay).

Amya Tikaia

"Amya tikaia" is a potion that erases one's memories of former relationships. Women often combine this with misbara to steal a man away from his wife and family. While the misbara insures that a man will leave his wife and children, the amya tikaia wipes out his memory of them. Many men born and raised in other zones come to the coast for work and marry locally. Their Miskito wives in Kuri may give them amya tikaia so that they forget their families in the interior and do not send money to their more long-term consanguineal relationships. Once Kuka explained, "he won't even remember his own mother." For a wife already on the coast, amya tikaia secures her husband's constant presence, and more importantly, his labor and resources for the larger matrilocal group.

Waowisa

"Waowisa" (to send through the air) is a potion that summons a person from a far off place. If the wind is blowing in the right direction, the intended will be touched on the cheek by something in the air. This is the waowisa potion, which then tantalizes him into coming directly to the man or woman who sent it. Waowisa is especially handy for women to have when men are involved with migrant wage labor;

some kukas in coastal villages claim that they utilized this sika in the past, when Miskito men worked in Belize for lumber companies. They use waowisa to entice a man into returning to Moskitia before he spends his pay on, or marries, another.

Whirling through the Air/Waowisa

Waowisa you
Nora sending this will cause a sudden memory
all the way to Natalio, he will remember me
when he falls asleep it will enter his heart
to Natalio, he will remember me
waowisa you, you will not fail
you will twist his heart around
after he sleeps, he will remember
when he thinks of his wife, he will run to her
if by stream, he will cross swimming
if by horse, he will come on top of it
waowisa, today I pray to you
tonight, in the middle of the night
go and strike Nora's husband
waowisa, I pray to you
to send this to the husband

Because women's sikas beguile men into giving them cash and gifts, make them fall in love with them, and erase their memories of former wives and families, men live in fear of being manipulated by women's bewitching potions. Men, as a result, purchase counteractive potions called klakaikas or kangbaias and contras in Spanish) and charms ("tups" or amulets) from the mainly older men and women who specialize in them, especially their mothers. Men use these charms and potions to defend themselves.[5] And many buzos take klakaikas regularly as a prophylaxis, just

in case a woman may try to influence him with praidey saihka in the future. Miskito men's fear of women's supernatural powers, as seen through their use of counteractive potions, may serve to reinforce female autonomy on the Miskito Coast.

Praidey Saihka as Subversive Discourse

In an attempt to elucidate how the "female autonomy" and "male authority" contradiction is resolved between women and men in their daily lives, I borrow from feminist researchers who examine women's voices as subversive discourse. Specifically, my research uses Abu-Lughod's (1985, 1990b), Messick's 1987, and Gal's (2001) interpretations of discourse as social practice to view parts of society that people find displeasing and want to change. My work shows that Miskito women use praidey saihka as a subversive discourse, a strategy to access resources from men and, thus, contest the male-dominant gender ideology. Gal (1991:176-178, 192-193) believes that in societies with patriarchical gender ideologies similar to Miskito society, "women's speech practices make visible a crack, a fault line in the dominant male discourse of gender and power, revealing it to be not monolithic but contradictory and thus vulnerable." Thus, my work contributes to research concerning the contestation of language, gender, and power relations in the everyday interactions between women and men.

Men's discourse of songs were publicly performed for all to hear, often in bodegas. However, women's discourse of praidey saihka were secretive and private,

performed while in the home alone. Two discourses of gender ideologies, men's dominant and public discourse and women's subordinate and private one are revealed. Through these speech events, the everyday contestations and negotiations of gender identities play out: men's public performance of power, as displayed in many of the buzo songs, is contested by women's private voices in matrilocal groups surrounding supernatural praidey saihka potions.

The dominant discourse is revealed in men's songs, while the subordinate discourse is revealed in women's incantations. A subordinate discourse is a form of expression characterized by its power relation to a dominant ideology with which it co-exists (Messick 1987:217). Such discourses are often called contradictory, secretive, and silent, because of their relationships to the more public, patriarchical ideologies of gender (Menon 1995). While subordinate discourses may be marginal, they still represent one of the many sites of struggle about kinship, gender, and power definitions (Gal 1991, 2001). Women's subordinate and subversive discourse of potions contests this male-dominant gender ideology and shows it is vulnerable. Men's fear of women's sexuality shows that their strategies are threatening to men.

A subordinate and subversive discourse revolves around women's use of praidey saihka that challenges an existing social hierarchy in Miskito society. My research has identified the following characteristics that qualify women's speech surrounding magic potions as subversive. Women's magic potions must a) be secretive and marginal, b) be oppressed by the dominant ideology, and c) offer

women alternative models of social action for their own empowerment (Gal 1991, 2001).[6] Godelier (1978:766, in Gal 1991) shows that in societies characterized by male dominance or sexual segregation, women subscribe to dominant ideologies specifically because they are the group that experiences oppression. What distinguishes subordinate and subversive is that the latter has to do with subverting the dominant ideology and being a real form of empowerment for the oppressed.

Secrecy

Many women, including Kuka Denecela, heard Daugo give his statement outside the cookhouse, but none dared respond to him in a public setting with their subordinate discourse. The secret and unspoken nature of women's speech genres, like women's magic potions, is precisely what gives them power to subvert the more public one. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, investigating magic potions is an extremely difficult task because of their highly secretive nature. The secrecy of using these potions adds to their psychological effectiveness and potency; and if someone discovers that you are using a magic potion, that potion is rendered ineffective. In interviews, then, it was useless to ask people if they were currently using potions. None could disclose this information, especially if they were using them on me or on friends of mine. Most of my information about who used potions was gathered laterally, with neighbors telling of each other's use.

Oppression

Strict rules of sexual segregation persist today in the economic, political, and religious realms of Miskito society. For the most part, only men participate in the lobster industry, in national and indigenous congresses, or as leaders in the Moravian church. It is not surprising, then, that both the church and state try to suppress the speech genre of "magic potions." The church, a major patriarchical force in Moskitia, denigrates most discourse of praidey saihka because it is associated with an indigenous belief system and non-christian gods. Men also try to suppress women's discourse surrounding praidey saihka specifically because they believe in, and thus, fear the more female and supernatural aspects of their indigenous religion. Still, there are others in Miskito society--mainly the most educated--who try to oppress magic potions by claiming not to believe in them at all. [7]

Empowerment

Most Miskito people perceive praidey saihka potions as that which effects social organization, including who one marries, divorces, and with whom one has children. Locals also maintain that potions affect household economics: although originally used for love (Conzemius 1932:145; Helms 1971:86), women use praidey saihkas to improve their economic alliances, mainly to gain access to cash from lobster divers. Miskito women's knowledge and use of secret magical potions empowers them to challenge the male dominant economy. They use praidey saihka to

control social relationships and household economics, especially with regard to mate selection and the ability of women to garner resources from men.

Local women employ the potions to control male and female relationships and to garner resources that would otherwise be unavailable to them. Magic potions are believed to be a practical way for women to achieve their economic goals through gaining access to cash that keeps their households afloat. Miskito women, then, do not just use magic potions as a ritual designed to release their frustrations before returning to a state of social equilibrium, thereby reinforcing the dominant discourse by faking rebelliousness (Price 1993). Rather, they use magic potions and the discourse surrounding them for instrumental reasons and real resistance. My study views Miskito women as agents of social change and highlights the strategies they use to access power and resources within and beyond their communities.

Miskito women's discourse surrounding magic potions is subversive because it is a secretive, experienced oppression, and real form of social resistance. Most importantly, women use potions and the discourse surrounding them instrumentally to gain access to resources and achieve their economic goals. Nevertheless, my analysis of the texts show that the women reinforce Miskito society's male-dominant gender hegemonies by working around a particular problem instead of facing it head on. The women, for example, do not recite spells that would magically render them to have access to wage-earning jobs. Instead the women use supernatural potions to control men who have jobs and earn money. Also, we must not forget that the Miskito

women's discourse of magic potions is a secret one. Miskito women secretly subvert the gender ideology. Because women never openly critique men, their secrecy also shows their subordinate position to men (Price 1993; Menon 1995).

Daugo, a Miskito man on the north coast of Honduras, stood in the patio area of his aunt's cookhouse. To avoid eye contact with his relatives standing there, he combed his fingers through his sun bleached hair and gazed out to sea. Finally, he turned toward them to explain why he had recently deserted his wife and children:

> Men have to make their own decisions, that's what makes them men. If a man wants to leave one day, he just makes his suitcase and goes when and where he pleases...No one owns me; I'm my own boss. No woman is gonna tell me what to do. I have women and children all over Moskitia...in Nicaragua, Jamaica, and the Bay Islands too. When I want to see them I just pick up and go and no wife of mine is gonna say anything--as long as she has a roof over her head and food on the table for the children, what can she say? If she complains, I'll stay away longer and that will make her think (learn her lesson).

The several women who heard Daugo speak in the patio did not respond to him, not even his grandmother Kuka Denecela. Denecela was not only Daugo's grandmother, but she was also his wife Delbia's aunt. The Kuka disapproved of Daugo deserting his children and did not want her great-grandchildren raised in a single parent home.

A few days later, the Kuka sat in her kitchen peeling yuca with a butcher knife and giving orders to her matrilineal descendants between the ages of 2 and 50. She lit her pipe, exhaled a long stream of smoke, and commented on the recent separation of her son's son and her female cousin's daughter:

> You listen to me, if Daugo doesn't go back to his wife and children by his own accord, I'll make him go back with my secret stand-bye love potion and he won't have a choice then, he'll never want to leave Delbia's house or her food again. He won't be able to stand it for one minute without the sight of her face. We'll see how much of his own boss he is after I give him a dose of my love potion. Hahahaha.

The statements by Daugo and the Kuka seem discordant. Daugo first threatened to leave Delbia if she complained about his other women and children. Then the Kuka countered with her own threat that she would use a magic potion to make her grandson return to his wife and family. Daugo's statement demonstrates the discourse of male domination in Miskito society, especially with regard to the double sexual standard where it is socially acceptable for men to have other lovers but not women. The Kuka's statement, on the other hand, reveals women's resistance to the patriarchical ideology of these local gender conceptions and the Miskito women's strategies to contest it. While Daugo's voice shows the dominant representations of gender relations in Moskitia, the Kuka's voice represents the subordinate discourse surrounding sika, a major form of women's self empowerment. Thus, two discourses exist in Moskitia: one is expressed in the everyday language and public interaction by men and women--in stores, discos, restaurants, and patios; the other is a more secretive and magical one, used in households and other female-centered domains.[8]

That Daugoberto, a man, gave the first quote and Kuka, a woman, gave the second, does not signify that these are examples of exclusive male and female world views or a classic he said/she said schism. Both sexes buy into the public discourse

concerning the male-dominant gender ideology. Because women learn both the shared ideological idiom and the subordinate discourse in Moskitia, they have cultural competence in two forms of discourse, the public and the private and intimate. They skillfully negotiate between the two ways of speaking depending on the setting and domain of the verbal interaction (Hymes 1972; Sherzer 1990).

Because women use strategies and praidey saihka incantations to empower themselves vis a vis the men and to gain access to their cash and resources, the incantations are a real form of social resistance. Miskito men are expected to deal with outsiders and make "important" village decisions that go beyond the household economy, child rearing, and other female domains. Indeed, women often defer "important" decisions until men return from their work and commonly use the expression, "men know best." Coastal Miskito women also say in front of others, "God first, men second, and women and children last." These cultural expressions display of women's participation in the dominant and public discourse; they are part of the formal and public transcript that belies women's autonomy in matrilocal groups and their manipulation of men through magic potions. These narratives are part of the dominant discourse on gender and kinship.

Patriarchical norms prevail in Moskitia. Men have primary access to resources today such as jobs, travel, and education that are not, for the most part, available to women. Understanding how Miskito women's speech fits within the public and dominant discourse of male authority, then, is helpful for understanding

the gender-power complex on the coast. It shows that women's actions and practices with regard to magic potions contradicts their public speech. It also illustrates how their discourse surrounding the potions empowers them to subvert the patriarchical system in which they live. Through their agency, therefore, women use magic potions that allows them to exercise autonomy and control in public and private spaces.

Considering the "female autonomy" and "male authority" contradiction that women and men experience in the daily lives of the Miskito, the story of Daugo and the Kuka is an instructive one. In the end, Daugo returned to his wife and children. Thus, this example identifies the kinds of language and power manipulations that keep the matrifocal community going; it also identifies in recorded text the ideological discourse that allows Miskito society to maintain its equilibrium. The texts show that praidey saihka incantations are the deep structure that keep the "female autonomy" and "male authority" contradiction from tearing apart Miskito society. Women live in two contradictory worlds and must actively negotiate and contest gender-power relations. Garcia (1996a:22) comments on this phenomenon:

> Female solidarity in Miskito society is strong and durable. And when this occurs, when the ties of soldarity between women tend to be strong, the real authority of men is not significant. Nevertheless, the formal appearance of the man-woman relations in Asang appears like the men are dominant and the women, dominated.

Garcia describes Asang where men are not absent from the village lobster diving and making large sums of money. Compared to the Plátano Biosphere, a less

contradictory gender and power complex seems to exist in Asang, where men's power is more significant. This contrasts with Kuri, where the women have learned to use situational gender identities to access male resources.

How do Miskito women construct situational gender identities in the Plátano Biosphere? Miskito women actively negotiate between two discourses of gender ideologies, one used in everyday contexts, and the other, within the female-centered world of mothers, daughters, and sisters. They change back and forth between the dominant and subordinate discourse of male authority and female autonomy. Through the Miskito women's heteroglossia, and control of distinct discourses, they construct situational identities during interactions with gendered Others.

Chapters eight and nine reveal the discourses of female autonomy and male authority through two speech events--women's incantations and men's song. Analysis of buzo songs and praiday saihka incantations shows that being a man has to do with providing resources to others in society and that womanhood was defined by manipulating others to access resources. This data contributes to our cross-cultural understanding of how gender, power, and sexuality are mutually constructed.

Notes to Chapter Nine

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1. Locals call cures made from both plants and bio-medicines (bought in pharmacies, clinics, or nurses homes) by the term sikas, but also use the words tasbaya saihka to distinguish plant cures from bio-medicinal ones. Tasbaya means "earth" and refers to the flora and fauna used in the remedies. The word sika in Tawahka is "ba sika" and

is related to the word "basni" (leaf). Ken Hale (1999, personal communication) believes "ba sika" to probably be the ancient form of the Miskito word "sika" today.

2. While the recipes vary tremendously, there are three major categories of praidey saihka that exist: 1) aisi sakaia that mainly involves a money payment to a plant, extracting or cutting the plant, and saying an oration, and the other 2) yabakaia and yumuh that require an additional element of ritualized blowing, and 3) yumuh that is the most potent, desired, and complicated being more ethereal and prayer oriented. People prefer and desire yumuhs because they cannot be diffused with a "contra" or a counter-active potion (Barrett 1992; Garcia 1996a; House and Sanchez 1997).

3. Paying the plant shows the Miskito reciprocity relationship they have with their natural resources. They must pay back nature or the plant spirit for using their resources. Garcia (1996a:140) says, "this payment to curative herbs in order to be able to pull off their leaves and use them therapeutically is also related to the conception of an individual indebted to his environment. It would seem that the Miskitu's magic conception is based on the idea that between man and his natural surroundings there must exist a permanent and reciprocal solidarity."

4. Such practices are not unique to the Miskito. Barrett (1992:291) makes similar observations about such Bush Doctors along the Nicaraguan coast: "He must sing a song and apologize to each plant before he picks it. This is in part to mollify the plant's supernatural owner, or dawanka, and in part to prepare the plant to be used as medicine."

5. Some mothers even protected their sons by providing them with sika or medicine for fighting. This sika was used so that a diver would not be killed in one of their frequent brawls when back on shore. Two medicines are often used in conjunction: "aiklabaia" which makes a man a stronger, better fighter and "suapaihka" which takes away the strength of one' s enemy in battle.

6. Gal (2001:424-425) believes women's speech genres are "resistance to a dominant cultural order" when they are "practiced and celebrated despite widespread denigration and stigmatization."

7. The more religious or "Christian" members of society, women and men alike, do not approve of manipulating relationships with magic potions. They believe only one type of magic potion, the yamni kaikan or love potion is acceptable to God because, as they reason, "God says love is good in the Bible." Women who are magic potion specialists but who also attend church have a more syncretic approach, claiming that "God made all the plants," and therefore, potions made from plants cannot be evil. Only a few of the most educated Miskito with multiple ties to the outside world say

that they do not believe in magic potions. Many are male political leaders trying to impress others with their more western education. Their friends and neighbors claim, however, that as soon as one of these men's families would have a problem, they would quickly turn to sika for a solution. Kuka Denecela said about one such individual, "you'll see how much he doesn't believe in sika when his son gets thrown in jail." Even the most educated and worldly Miskito, however, believe in the curative powers of plants made into potions for physical illness.

8. This has led some scholars to refer to this as a kind of women's heteroglossia (Abu-Lughod 1985:246). Abu-Lughod (1985) examined Arabic-speaking men's emotional lives. She showed they controlled two discourses; one was public and represented the ideal social behavior; the other, expressed in poetry, showed the everyday and ordinary beliefs about social interactions. She explored the differences between ordinary and more poetic language.

Chapter Ten: Conclusions

My research shows how Miskito identity is constructed, maintained, and negotiated in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve. I highlighted Miskito inter-ethnic relations at the regional level, and assessed Miskito village organization and gender at the local level. My research objectives are aimed at showing how Miskito identity is passed down in matrilocal groups and demonstrating that Miskito individuals construct situational ethnic and gender identities during interactions with Others. Being raised in matrilocal groups and using one's identities situationally fortifies the strong, but fluid nature of Miskito identity.

Miskito individuals create situational ethnic identities in the biosphere reserve for strategic and instrumental reasons (see chapter five). They manipulate cultural markers of *Blackness* and *Indianness*, and, thus, construct "situational identities" to define themselves when interacting with indigenous, ethnic, national, and international Others. My work has documented the cultural markers of identification--including language use in context, ethnic terms of reference, and stereotypes--that individuals in the reserve use to categorize themselves and Others. This is followed by a review of the specific settings and contexts in which the Miskito construct their multiple and fluid identities within the parameters of the reserve.

Most research on identity and ethnicity now employs a consrtuctivist perspective for understanding how different groups formulate their own identity. Those using constructivist approaches, especially after incorporating post-modernist assumptions concerning the Other, have advanced our understanding of ethnicity.

Anthropological approaches to identity now focus on the process in which identities are authenticated in the present (Hanson 1999). Likewise, my research details this process for Miskito peoples living in the Plátano Biosphere. Miskito individuals authenticate their identity during the process of "Other-becoming" or alterity as described by a number of analyses (Viveiros de Castro 1992; Taussig 1993).

Village organization in Kuri reveals that Miskito identity is crafted and transmitted in matrilocal groups, largely without the sustained presence of men. My analysis of Miskito patterns of social organization (including marriage, residence, household composition, inheritance and descent) underscores how children are raised almost completely by their mother and her relatives. My research also unveils how Miskito women construct their gendered identities in an effort to gain access to household resources (see chapters six-nine). They participate in two different discourses of gender that I have labeled "male authority" and "female autonomy." Male authority is evident in public contexts, such as stores, discotheques, and village patios; whereas female autonomy is articulated in the most intimate and secretive contexts of the household and other feminine domains. As seen elsewhere (Abu-Lughod 1985, 1990b; Gal 1991, 2001; Messick 1987), Miskito women manipulate linguistic heteroglossia, controlling distinct discourses or ways-of-speaking depending on the context and setting

My study incorporates instrumentalist approaches to ethnicity with identity theory to illustrate how Miskito ethnic and gender identities are used situationally to gain access to resources in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve. My conclusions are

that Miskito women shift back and forth between various identities (subject positions) and discourses during their interactions with Others in the reserve. They construct situational identities, depending on the context at hand, to ensure their households' economic survival. They also pass down Miskito language and traditions to their children. The Plátano Miskito women's situational use of identities, then, may be the most significant and strategic social adaptation to living in the coastal multi-cultural milieu. Women's ability to situationally use their ethnic and gender identities may ensure the survival of the Miskito peoples.

Border Crossings

I remember the plane ride to the Plátano Biosphere gateway community of Palacios in 1991, during my first venture to the north coast, the plane was filled with people of varying physical appearances. I recall sitting next to a woman with a baby girl on her lap and I didn't know whether they were Miskito or not. Because of the ethnic diversity in the region, I was often confused about peoples' identities, especially at the beginning of fieldwork. Here I was, coming to study the Miskito people, but I couldn't clearly recognize them, mostly because of the tremendous variations in their physical appearance. I would later learn, as discussed above, that because of Miskito inter-ethnic marriage patterns, they often "looked like" Ladinos, Pech, Tawahka, Garífuna, Creoles, and even like Islanders with light skin and eyes.

At the outset, I was also confused by the terms of references used by locals when speaking Spanish. As discussed in chapter five, a social anomaly can be

observed in my fieldwork site: Ladinos (mestizos) are called "Indios" (Indians) by the local indigenous groups. In Honduran cities, however, the Spanish-speaking mestizo population call the Miskito, Pech, and Tawahka peoples "Los indios de La Mosquitia" (the Indians of Moskitia). This use of "Indio" seemed to be one of a few cases of identity inversion in the reserve.

Through living in Kuri and studying the Miskito language, I began to understand the local or indigenous system of identity and inter-ethnic relations from a Miskito point of view. I even and found myself appropriating Miskito stereotypes of Others. At times, I disdained the self-serving and evil Ladinos, belittled the more "primitive" Pech, and racialized the Creoles and Garífuna. It was then that I noticed how the Miskito used their identities situationally during exchanges with Others.

A striking example of situational identity occurred at a 1997 conference, "The Cultural Identity of Indigenous People in Central America," which I attended in La Ceiba. About twenty-five indigenous and ethnic representatives from Central America participated. The NGOs and other leaders suggested that the representatives vote to change the conference name to "The Cultural Identity of Indigenous People and Blacks in Central America." Some indigenous representatives from the more "pure" or "Indian-looking" groups, like the Maya and Kuna, believed they were changing the name of the conference to include all three Atlantic Coast groups (the Garífuna, Miskito, and Creoles) who they perceived as sharing the common identity of Blacks in the diaspora. The Miskito representatives, in turn, voted in favor of

changing the conference name to be inclusive of the Creoles and Garífuna, who in their minds, they perceived as being Black.

During a discussion that took place one evening following the conference, a K'ekchi Maya woman from Belize explained that she perceived the Miskito to be Blacks. My roommate at the conference, a Honduran Miskito woman, told me later, "We're not Blacks, we're a Miskito mix, but if whoever is paying for this conference wants me to be Black, then Black I am." After spending the allowance she received in La Ceiba from the conference organizers, she returned to her north coast village where she would never, among her own people, be considered Black.

I learned more about Miskito situational ethnic identities in 1998 when I traveled overland with a group of Honduran Miskito representatives to a conference in Bilwi (Puerto Cabezas), Nicaragua. The "Central American Seminar on the Territorial Rights and Legalization of Indigenous Territory," sponsored by the US NGO Native Lands, together with a Costa Rican NGO SKOKI, and the local University URRACAN (Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe de Nicaragua) included indigenous representatives from Peru, Mexico, and all the Central American countries. After the Honduran Miskito men had listened for three days to their Nicaraguan Miskitu kinsmen refer to themselves collectively as "Indians" (speaking in their own language) one disgruntled Honduran man got up to take a break and smoke a cigarette outside. Leaving, he leaned down and said to me, "Why am I an Indian? I'm a Miskito man." This reminded me of the day in Kuri when Enemecia defined what she called the Miskito race, "We are not Indians or

Blacks...we are all mixed, we are like beans and rice...we are sambos, mulattos, and mestizos...we are all Miskito because we speak Miskito."

Defining Miskito Identity

My study answers three major questions about Miskito identity in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve: 1) How is their identity defined?; 2) What makes their identity so strong?; and 3) What newer identity constructions have resulted from their living in this important protected area?

My study finds the elementary ingredients for Miskito identity at the local and regional to be the following: being of mixed ancestry, living in female-headed households and matrifocal family groups, learning one's mother's culture, language, and traditions, participating in outside economies, having cash-oriented obsessions, and using situational identities during interactions with indigenous, ethnic, and gendered Others. These are the elements of Miskito society that combine to define Miskito identity at the local and regional level. Anthropologists have studied local identities that are not defined by the political institution of the state elsewhere along the Central American Atlantic Coast (Bonner 1999; Cosminsky 1976; CIDCA 1982; Garcia 1996a; Jamieson 1996, 2000a, 2000b). However, these studies do not fully consider how gender-power relations inform local and regional discourses of identity.

The Miskito grew as an ethnic group during the colonial era by intermarriage with other groups, male participation in migrant labors, and passing down identity in matrilocal groups (Conzemius 1932; Helms 1971). My research found similar

contemporary patterns, and reveals a modern example of how the Miskito have fortified such a strong yet fluid ethnic identity. As a mixed and multi-lingual population, the Miskito are afforded the social space to create situational ethnic identities. Miskito women also created situational gender identities, demonstrated by their participation in the subversive discourse of "female autonomy."

My research suggests that it is the Miskito people's ability to use situational identities and different discourses of power that afford them such a strong yet malleable identity. Most significantly, the Plátano Reserve Miskito construct situational identities as Blacks and Indians both within and beyond reserve boundaries. This was seen in their broader use of ethnic terms of reference, including the terms, "Indian" and "Black" when dealing with Others, while amongst themselves, they would never employ these terms self-referentially. Miskito individuals who use situational ethnic identities during interactions with Others first learn this behavior at home in matrigroups where their mothers switch back and forth between different gendered and ethnic identities. Being Miskito, then, is shaped by alterity or Other-becoming. Following this line of thinking, the more situational uses of identity a Miskito individual employs, the more Miskito he or she "becomes." The Miskito in the Plátano Biosphere, who now confront more complex discourses of power, have the opportunity to become more Miskito by situationally constructing their identities as Indians, Blacks, indigenous people, Biosphere and Moskitia residents, and Hondurans as the need arises. Their ability to create "situational identities" while refortifying Miskito collective identity is an intrepid social skill in today's world.

Identity Theory Revisited

Ever since social scientists have become interested in ethnicity there have been three primary approaches to understanding collective identities: primordialism (that ethnicity stems from ancestral ties), instrumentalism (identity is used strategically for economic and political gain), and constructivism (that identity is created and recreated in various social contexts) (chapter three). For theories of identity to be pertinent, they should explain the salience of ethnic violence that characterizes the postcolonial world. The mobilization of ethnic groups seeking autonomous homelands has threatened nation states throughout Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and the Balkans (Davis 1988; Janzen 1999; Maybury-Lewis 1997, 2002). When groups mobilize politically and take up arms against the state and each other, ancestry is often invoked and people's primordial attachments are aroused.

In the last fifty years, anthropologists have increasingly turned away from primordialist explanations of ethnicity, and embraced socially constructed explanations. Primordialism and constructivism are normally treated as mutually exclusive approaches and the primordialists' view of ethnicity based on biology is highly criticized today due to its deterministic and racist overtones. Therefore, current constructivist approaches are at odds with many indigenous peoples who presently challenge the state with primordialized identities that link blood and land. They cannot account for the primordial attachments, often perceived, that define recent world-wide ethnic and separatist movements (Janzen 1995).

With the recent increase in ethnic mobilizations world-wide, constructivists and instrumentalists alike need to find a way to understand the essentialized way ethnic groups see their own identity as a "raza" and the cultural markers they attribute to individuals and the group. Some researchers examine visceral emotions and racial stereotypes that arise in the process of ethnicization (Janzen 2000; Malkki 1992; Nash 1989). The Miskito, who consider themselves to be a mixed people, are learning to define their identities primordially as a race or "raza" with ancestral ties to land that existed before the creation of the Honduran state. This point was brought home to me in 1997, when I attended a workshop of the newly developing Biosphere Río Plátano Project in the Garífuna village Batalla. One Miskito political leader stood up and proclaimed, "We are Miskito, the original inhabitants and owners of Moskitia. We speak our own Miskito language and fish, farm, and hunt to survive." The new and essentialized way the Miskito see their own identity must be considered.

As a result of living in a protected area for more than a quarter of a century, the Plátano Miskito have participated in the more global discourse of natural and cultural conservationists issues. Those Miskito who live in the Plátano Biosphere now articulate their identity as natural and cultural conservationists during their interactions with national and international Others. The reserve was established to protect the region's biologically diverse rainforest and coastal environments, and also its cultural diversity and heritage. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Miskito have learned to present themselves as possessing their own culture and language that differs from the larger, national population. They simultaneously stress their primordialized ties to

Moskitia, their historic homeland, dating to a time before the establishment of the Honduran state (England 1996).

Post-modernist approaches have allowed me to view Miskito identity as processual and constantly being invented and reinvented. Most significantly, the "invention of tradition" approach sees these essentialized identities largely as invented ones (Hanson 1989, 1999; Jackson 1995; Wade 1997). Seeing a tradition as invented, however, does not mean that it is made-up or fake. The approach sees all invented traditions as equally authentic and believes inventions are a normal part of all cultures and social life. This particular post-modernist approach allows me to view the various situational uses of Miskito identity at the local, regional, national, and international levels all as inventions. My work will help to answer critical questions as to how inhabitants of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve are inventing and reinventing their identities as a result of living in an environmentally protected area.

My approach to Miskito identity formulation combines instrumentalist and constructivist theories, yet considers perceived primordial attachments that play out in the process of Miskito ethnicization. The Miskito use recursive markers to construct their identities as Blacks and Indians instrumentally, to gain resources from the state and international NGO's (Jackson 1991, 1995; Lewis 2000; Wade 1997). Miskito individuals, then, essentialize or primordialize their identities situationally. These revelations should contribute to the social scientific understanding of the process of authentification and ethnicization occurring in the Plátano Biosphere, as

well as in the broader Honduran Moskitia, and perhaps in similar settings in other states around the world.

Gender and Identity in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (RPBR)

One of the main goals of this dissertation is to show the important role Miskito women play in the proliferation of Miskito culture. Studies of indigenous identity in Central America have mainly concerned identity formation within the context of the state, emphasizing the male political world of indigenous federations. The process of indigenous identity formation, however, begins in the "everyday" relationships between mothers and children. If it is true that women in all cultures transmit identity, culture, and language to their offspring, then this is especially true for the Miskito.

Because of male-absenteeism in the reserve's coastal villages, Miskito identity is first authenticated in the matrilocal group. Weiner (1976) showed that Trobriand women in their roles--not simply as wives--but as mothers, daughters, and sisters, produce and reproduce cultural processes. This is true in Kuri where Miskito women are increasingly responsible for the perpetuation of Miskito culture and identity in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve.

While Western narratives of power mainly consider men who hold titled political offices, power in Plátano Miskito villages is also vested in women's everyday creating and shaping of cultural practices and social identities (Blackwood 2000). Social scientists, conservationists, and developers have not yet taken this into full

consideration. In fact, the focus has previously been on the male role in traditional economic activities such as subsistence and hunting activities and their use and control of natural resources. The role indigenous women play in maintaining culture, identity, and language within an international protected area, such as the Plátano Biosphere, need to be understood. My research also relates to more global issues of cultural and natural conservation because it details women's control over natural and cultural resources in a protected area.

The female-centered residential compound in Kuri defines what it means to be culturally Miskito in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve. My research shows that land (both in the villages and riverine agricultural sites), as well as many aspects of traditional culture are passed down mainly through the female line. The reserve helps protect a land tenure system that ensures the ability for matrilocal units to endure inter-generationally. This ostensibly should empower Miskito women who control traditional cultural knowledge, economic resources, and own lands protected by international reserve boundaries (Herlihy 1996a).

With the introduction of western religions, economies, and patriarchical state institutions, Miskito women lost power in relation to men. Today, however, women may enhance their power through interactions with more global, conservation networks. Outside conservation initiatives should more highly value women, especially in their roles as mothers, and as transmitters of culture, language, and identity to new generations. Invariably, we will witness the empowerment of indigenous women cross-culturally as human rights, conservation, and development

organizations focus attention on indigenous women's roles as preservers of cultural and linguistic practices.

My work can be called "ethno-feminism" for it views indigenous women as the primary preservers of nationally and internationally protected resources. Ethno-feminism positions indigenous women as central players in the preservation of much of the world's cultural and linguistic diversity. This is particularly important because indigenous cultures and languages are disappearing at an alarming rate today. As the Río Plátano Miskito enter more global discourses of conservation and indigenous issues, Miskito women may emerge as highly valued conservators of their cultural and linguistic resources within the boundaries of this internationally protected region (Herlihy 1996a).

Gender and Power in Coastal Miskito Villages

As I have demonstrated, the gender-power complex of Miskito society is formed within the "female autonomy" and "male authority" contradiction. A women's dominance in the village arena contradicts the male dominant ideology brought on by historical forces such as wage labor. Matrilocal post-marital rules create communities of related women where the men have no familial ties of their own. Female autonomy and matrifocality predominate. Senior women, called kukas, play the most powerful roles in society, garnering status, prestige, and resources from their children and grandchildren. The power that women have in local Miskito society, then, lies outside of the domain of the patriarchical Honduran state. Miskito society is

historically situated in a political economy where men participate in migrant wage labor and have more access than women to money, jobs, and education. Representatives of the national government, teachers, pastors, and indigenous political leaders are also, almost exclusively, men. Through their jobs as lobster divers, men retain their "male authority" as the main wage earners.

The Miskito have participated in a cash-based economy for more than two centuries and are becoming ever more cash-dependent through the lobster industry. They are in Mary Helms' terms, a "purchase society" where members are psychologically and physically dependent on foreign and store-bought goods. Because men provide the cash resource that women increasingly desire, this reinforces male-authority in the coastal communities of the Plátano Biosphere.

Miskito lobster divers have "commoditized" relations with Others. They support their wives' households and "gift" small items to relatives and children. They spend money partying with other divers, taking turns buying rum, cigarettes, and snacks. They also practice an economy of affection with women, paying mairin mana after having sexual relations with them. While their jobs are dangerous, men continue diving because no other alternative exists to earn such inflated wages (Dodds 1998; Meltzoff and Schull 1999). The man who kills the most lobster, earns the most money, and gives the most away, acquires the highest amount of prestige in coastal Miskito society.

Sika potions, once used for love, now are mainly an economic venture for women, a way to access money from men. Not only do women pay plants to coerce them into acting supernaturally on their behalf, but they also use the plants to get money from men. Additionally, women sell their plant potions for profit to others along the coast. The relationship between magic potions and money clearly illustrates how the Miskito have blended their belief system with cash-oriented obsessions. Due to the effects of the expanding global economy and the long-term presence of outside economies in the region, Miskito peoples are increasingly incorporating cash into their exchange relations, rituals, and beliefs.

Miskito gender relations shows that we can not easily characterize Miskito men and women's status. Men and women experience ambiguity in their daily lives due to the flagrant "female autonomy" vs. "male authority" contradiction. "Female autonomy" within village matrilocal groups and "male dominance" within the broader coastal economy are contradictory, yet related parts of the gender-power complex on the Miskito Coast. If coastal Miskito society continues its trend toward matrifocality, the private discourse of magic potions may increasingly empower women to reach their economic goals, further transforming gender ideologies in the future.

Meat, Men, and Money

Just before I left Kuri at the end of my last field season at the close of the 1998 veda, Kuka Denecela had fallen into a dreary state. Her daughters also looked defeated. They had not eaten anything but beans, rice and bananas for nearly two

weeks. Their world was monotonous, their outlook on life, bleak. Kuka said, "My husband has forgotten about me. He has not sent any foods down in weeks. And even if there was meat for sale, I could never afford to buy it." She said, "No meat, no men, no money, I'm going to die." When I asked the Kuka which scarce resource on the coast that she wanted the most, she answered, "huina" (meat). She explained, "Look out the window, you see lots of men pass by, sure to have money in their pockets, but when's the last time you've seen a piece of meat walk by?" Meat, a prestigious item that the women mainly purchased with cash, was the resource that Kuka Denecela and the Kuri women most highly desired. Accessing a man, and subsequently, his money would have been merely a means to an end. In this case, sika could not get her meat directly, sika could get her a man and his money, and with this money, she could purchase meat.

I sent Kuka one of my instant soups daily and purchased what I could during the rest of the veda. And with the opening of the lobster-diving season that August, she and her daughters returned to their more highly spirited selves. Excitement prevailed as the lobster boats, merchandise boats, and advance payments to the divers all arrived together. Just before the first boats reached Kuri, Delfina and Tomassa (the sisters that owned small bodegas) looked out to the sea. Delfina raised her nose to the wind and said, "the smell of money is in the air." Her sister began to rub her hands together in anticipation and responded, "any minute now."

Miskito Identity and Globalization

Miskito in the Plátano Biosphere now articulate their identity through their interactions with two major global economic and political forces--the conservationists and the lobster industry. Although the Miskito peoples at the global level are known as conservationists, at the local level, Miskito identity is increasingly wrapped up in the lobster economy and in related cash-oriented obsessions. Can they be natural and cultural conservationists while at the same time a) living in a purchase society with cash-oriented obsessions, b) working as lobster divers in the world economy?, and c) exploiting lobster, a threatened natural resource? The Miskito must negotiate between their new positions in the global economy as conservationists, capitalist consumers, and exploited laborers. Increasing interlinkages between the Miskito as producers and consumers in the global economy may bring new challenges to their identity constructions.

Glossary

aisabe	good-bye.
aiklabaia	a type of sika used to make a man a stronger, better fighter.
aksbil	sea turtle.
ai lihkan	a type of sika used to attract, seduce, or garner resources usually from one particular man.
amya tikaia	a type of sika that erases one's memories of former relationships.
advans	advance payment that buzos receive prior to leaving for work on the lobster boats (E.)
aka	Russian made machine guns (AK 47's) used by the Miskito during the Nicaraguan revolution and the Contra-Sandinista war (S.)
Anti	kinship term for Mother's Sister (E.)
aouu	yes.
barra	the sand bar or edge of a body of water. Often used in village names, such as Barra Platano, the village at the edge of Rio Platano (S.)
batana	fat or chubby; a sign of beauty among the Miskito.
bodega	bar; usually a home made of local materials that sells beer and rum when available (S.)
buzo	deep-water lobster diver; becoming a man in Miskito society is related to working as a diver, and through bravery, one proves their masculinity. The divers have their own culture and rituals such as vagando and "giving it all away" (S.)
bulto	a package of cocaine; locals searched the coast for these packages that arrive on shore after being dumped overboard by boats, often after having been being stopped by the coast guard for inspection or who are deliberately making a drop off to someone on shore (S.)

cacao	a plant that produces beans that are ground into chocolate. (S.)
canaletes	paddles (S.)
cayuco	large barrel shaped canoe made to navigate the sea (S.) More often called dori in Miskito.
cayuquero	a canoeman who works alongside the lobster diver.
CES	an acronym used by the police force that previously worked in the region.
cocal	coconut plantation (S). The Miskito word for coco is kuku.
Comanche	assistant to the saca buzo; is responsible for making sure a certain number of divers leave for their boats on time (E.)
comedor	a small restaurant, usually a woman serves food out of her kitchen (S.)
curandera	plant specialist; often works with a sukia, like a nurse to a doctor (S.)
dahn	an expression that means there is no more, the resource has been depleted, or it's over (E.)
dama	kinship term for Grandfather or respected male elder
damni wan	a set of restrictions that a sick person must follow in order to be healed. Mainly a person with an illness must not see females who are menstruating, anyone who has recently seen a dead person, or those who have recently engaged in sexual relations. All of these would place negative effects on the healing process.
dawan	owner, often this refers to supernatural entities that are the owner of resources; plant spirits are called the owners of the plants; God in Christian churches is called the owner of the earth and the other world, and the liwa mairin (mermaid) in the traditional Miskito belief system is thought of as owner of all resources from the waterways.
Doña	a term of respect for a married woman in Spanish.
England	a person of British ancestry (E.)

fogon	clay hearth (S.)
guamiles	plantation plots of crops, such as plantains, yuca, or orange trees (S.)
hospedaje	tourist house where visitors and eco-tourists can reside (S.)
huba setan	evil person (setan, E.)
huina	meat; also called "upan."
implikaia	to steal; often Miskito individuals talk bad about their own people, accusing them of thievery.
ini minit	any minute (E.)
Ispael	Ladino
kiampka	family agricultural lands with seasonal work camps; called "champas" in Spanish, and camps in English.
kabura	being-on-the-coast.
kai ki was	see you later; a polite and informal way to say good-bye.
kaiura ikaia	a type of sika that takes away a man's virility; this term .literally means to kill the yuca, a metaphor for the penis in locally spoken Miskitu language.
kapi	coffee (E.)
Karibi	the term of reference for a Garifuna individual and culture group.
kasao	cashew fruit.
kauhla	cold; often refers to a person who is not sexually inclined.
kiamp	the traditional patrilineal descent group symbolized by a common male surname; in coastal Honduran society, kiamp is now used to refer to a matirgroup.
kikalmuk	a kinship term for eldest sister, often shortened to "Kika."

kirbaia	to go out walking around and socializing (paseando in Spanish).
klaura	being-up-river.
klakaika	counteractive potion that locals take to defend themselves against sika that others put on them; also called "kangbaia" (M.) and "contras" (S.)
kuka	kinship term for grandmother figure or respected female elder.
kuku dusa	coconut tree.
kupia karna	to be brave.
kupia ikaia	a type of sika that prevents men from being jealous of their wives.
kupia siksa	an evil, bad, or mean person.
kupia pihini	a good person.
Kriol	ethnic term of reference for a Creole or English-speaking Black (E.)
kunin	a lie, exaggeration, or gossip' also called turi aisisa.
kuk	cook; a job on the lobster boat. (E.)
kus aisisa	to curse.
kusni	frizzy.
kwasaia	crawling; often used to refer to night crawling, typically when a wahma crawls into a tiara's house at night. In Spanish, the term is gateando (or literally, catting).
labsta	lobster (E.)
lalahni	blonde.
lala apu	an emphatic way of saying to have no money; for example, flat broke.
lala brisa	to be rich (literally, to have money).

lakra	a kinship term for someone of the different sex but same generation.
lamni laka	peaceful.
landing	the canal's bank; villagers used as a natural dock for their canoes (E.)
lapta	hot or passionate.
lapia	ritualized kinship term for she or he who cuts the umbilical cord of a child during birth; also called klua klakisa.
lasa	spirit.
lempiras	the name of the Honduran national currency (S.)
leña	pine wood (S.)
lilka	soul of a person; also used for the term picture.
liwa(s)	supernatural water spirits with different genders and races. The most common Liwa is the liwa mairin or mermaid; also called li dawanka (creator and owner of all bodies of water and water life, including flora and fauna).
liwa siknis	a variety of illness that the liwas cause; most significantly, the liwa causes the bends (decompression sickness) in divers (siknis, E.)
luhpia	kinship term meaning child.
madrina	Christian godmother. In Miskito society, madrinas call the parents of the child "co-madre" and "co-padre" as in the Spanish-speaking world.
maia	spouse; defined as those who live together and usually have children.
mairin mana	an exchange of cash for sexual relations; this commodification of affection is not defined by society's members as prostitution, but as a gift or present.
malanga	a starchy, tuber plant with a scaly skin (S.)
Meriki	an ethnic term of reference for a North American or northern European

min	mean-spirited; used with the term huba, as in huba min (really mean). Locals call divers this who do not buy them presents at the store (E.)
marinero	Sailor; a position on the lobster boats that requires more education than the buzos have; typically marineros have to read the boats instruments (such as a compass), that direct its trajectory (S.)
millionario	anyone having a moderate amount of wealth (S.)
mochilas	back-packs; buzos carry them to sea with all their belongings they will have for two weeks on the boat (S.)
monte	mountain or forest (S.)
muihki	kinship term of reference for someone of the same sex and same generation; thus, cousins and siblings of the same sex are called by the same term. Also, a half-sibling is called muihki. Locals use the informal kinship term "muihki muihki" to refer to a sibling of the same sex from the same parents.
Musti	ethnic term of reference for a Bay Islander.
mustro	a type of fish.
nance	a yellow fruit that looks like a berry (S.)
nari	spicy; used to describe food and also to refer to someone who is highly sexual and passionate.
panika	friend
Paya	a term of reference for a Pech person.
pain	fine (E.)
paip glas	spy glass or telescope (E.)
piarka	widow
pipante	flat-bottomed river canoe, called pitpan in Miskito (S.)
plaisni	adoring kinship term for the youngest child; "seca leche" in Spanish.

platanos — bananas (S.)

platu — a small species of banana grown locally.

plunki — an assistant to the cook on the lobster boats.

prisant — a gift; usually refers to the gift of money from a diver (E.)

maia prukaia — to yell at or hit one's spouse.

praidey saihka — a type of sika mainly made on Fridays that is used to control relationships and feelings. Women originally used praiday saihka potions for love but now use them mainly to garner resources from the lobster divers (E.)

rintin — second-hand clothes sold in the region.

ritskira — very rich (E.)

rum diaia — to drink rum.

saca buzo — a employee of the boat Captain who hires local men as divers (S.)

sadi — sad. Also used synonymously with lala apu (E.)

Shinese — ethnic term of reference for a Chinese person or anyone of Asian heritage (E.)

sika — any medicine used to heal emotional, spiritual, or physical illness, usually made with plants.

sika saura — supernatural medicine, called mana negra (or black magic) in Spanish used to hurt, make sick, or kill others.

slabla — stingy.

stand-by — a type of sika used to coerce someone of the opposite sex into being attentive to one's every personal need (E.)

suapaihka — a type of sika that takes away the strength of one' s enemy in battle. Divers use suapaihka to help them in fights that develop after they have returned to shore and are vagando.

sukia	a spiritual or supernatural healer.
Sumu	ethnic term of reference for a Tawahka Sumu person or the entire culture group.
tambaco(s)	Christmas celebrations including night-time gatherings with dancing, singing, and guitar and drum playing. Tambaco typically begins a few months before Christmas and lasts through New Year's Day.
tahti	kinship term for mother's brother (see tubani).
tatwa	sharp.
tahnta	thin.
taya pauni	red skin.
taya pihni	white skin.
taya siksa	black skin; also called karibi or huba siksa (too black).
tiara	adolescent girl.
tilba	a huge animal with an elephant-like trunk and a horse-like body native to Central and South American rainforests.
tuban	kinship term for a man's sister's son; corresponds with the kinship term tahti (mothers brother). The tuban-tahti (mother's son and mother's brother) kinship relationship is a special one that existed between a boy and his mother's brother who often supervises his entrance into manhood.. These respectful kinship terms were often adopted as terms of reference by many diver-canoeman teams, despite their actual relationship.
tup	charm or amulet, usually used as a counteractive remedy to defend oneself against a sika that another person may put on you. Divers use anti-liwa (mermaid) tups so that she will not give them the bends.
umpira	destitute, poor, or pathetic; often used synonymously with lala apu (to be poor broke).

vagando — drifitng, loitering or roaming. Lobster divers let off a little steam when back on safe ground referred to their land-loving behavior as vagando.

teposquintle — a type of nutria, the largest rodent in the Americas.

tingki — thank-you; tingki pali means "thanks a lot" (E.)

tasbaya taihka — a ritualized kinship term (literally means family of the land). The Miskito create a fictive kinship with non-family members who live in their village.

trucha — store.

tuk-tuk — a dug-out canoe with an outboard motor, usually with a low horse power.

Turko — ethnic term of reference for those of Arabic ancestry or from the Middle East (S.)

twi — the savanna, also commonly called the llano in Spanish.

upla — person or people.

upla ikaia — to murder.

upla saura — bad people to be avoided at all times.

upla wal aisaia apia — snobbish people. Literally, those who do not talk with others.

vagando — roaming around, usually being up to no-good.

verano — dry season (Jan-June); "mani tain" or "lapta mani" in Miskito (S.)

veda — a four month moratorium on lobster diving from April to August (S.)

velorio — a wake.

waikna — a man or person.

waikna laikaia
: to like men. When used with the word huba (meaning too much or a lot), as in huba waikna laik (to be boy crazy and promiscuous).

waikna saihka
: another term for praiday saihka; literally, man medicine.

wanina
: jealous. Men accuse women of being boy-crazy and women accuse men of being jealous. This he said-she said battle of the sexes causes many divorces.

waowisa
: a sika that summons a person from afar to return home immediately.

war uplika
: war-like or violent.

winsday saihka
: another term for praiday saihka; literally, Wednesday medicine. Wednesday is a ritualized day when Praiday Saihka is made.

yamni kaikian
: love. Also used as the name of a type of sika which makes all living things like you, including elders, children, and even animals.

yang
: I (first person pronoun in Miskito).

yapti
: kinship term used for mother; mama is also used. Often mama and yapti are extended to one's aunts on one's mother's sisters.

Yerman
: ethnic term of reference for a German person or anyone from Germany.

yuca
: a starchy tuber plant.

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Vita

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